

# **The Experience in Perception**

## **A Defence of a Stative Conception of Experiences**

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I, Sebastián Ignacio Sanhueza Rodríguez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

**Abstract**

In contemporary philosophy of perception, relatively little attention is paid to the fundamental question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences, that is, what kind of entities they are. The present dissertation addresses this ontological question, so as to outline and partially to defend a *stative view* of perceptual experiences, that is, a view according to which perceptual experiences are mental states as opposed to mental processes.

This project is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 unpacks and critically assesses the main target of this dissertation, a *processive view* or a view according to which processes of a phenomenally conscious kind are essential to our understanding of perceptual awareness. Chapter 2 formulates the ontological stance I advocate, namely, a *stative view*. The following two chapters turn to a positive defense of this position. Chapter 3 argues that the *stative conception* is better suited than a *processive view* to account for the identity over time of perceptual experiences. Chapter 4 turns to what is known as the *assertive character* of perceptual experiences: in a nutshell, the thought is that, when a

subject is perceptually aware of her surroundings or undergoes perceptual hallucinations, she does not passively entertain a complex mosaic of worldly items; instead, her experiences present her with such items as being the case. The assertive character of perceptual experiences is, I think, a feature best accommodated by a stative view than a processive one. Finally, chapter 5 explores how a stative view may specify the difference between perceptual experiences and beliefs: in this context, I argue that a stative view seems to vindicate state nonconceptualism, that is, the view that perceptual states need not be concept-dependent.

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## PREFACE

A crucial notion in the philosophy of perception – its subject-matter, if you may – is that of perceptual experiences. Perceptual experiences refer to a fundamental conscious component of perceptual phenomena and their deceptive counterparts. Thus, when you perceive the world, you do not merely process environmental information the same way a standard stimulus-response system (e.g. a computer, a very basic plant, etc.) does so: in addition to that, you are aware of your surroundings. Likewise, when you undergo illusions or hallucinations, it seems to you as if things are a certain way, even if they fail to be so. To pick up on the relevant component of perceptual consciousness, philosophers and psychologists often rely on the notion of perceptual (i.e. veridical, illusory, or hallucinatory) experiences. To a first approximation, then, the experience in perception picks up on a subject's awareness or consciousness resulting from her perceptual interaction with the environment: when a subject is perceptually aware of the world, things appear in a number of ways to her. To focus on the visual modality, when a subject is visually aware of her surroundings, worldly items look a manifold number of ways to her.

In a stimulating but utterly neglected paper, Elizabeth Wolgast focuses on visual, veridical perception so as to introduce the notion of perceptual experience:

(1) There is a certain kind of experience which is absolutely necessary to seeing, so that if someone did not have this kind of experience at a certain time he would not be seeing anything then. (2) This experience is not the *whole* of what we mean when we say we see something, because ordinarily we mean also to imply that that thing is before us. (3) This kind of experience must be such as can help explain, in some way or other, why we believe we are seeing one thing at one time and another thing at another. (Wolgast 1960, 165-6)

Wolgast describes the relevant experiential component as a necessary but non-sufficient ingredient of visual perception. When we reflect on the latter phenomenon, we are typically interested in the perceptual awareness

underpinning the informational transaction between a perceiver and her visible surroundings. And yet it does not follow that a subject perceives a worldly item or state of affairs if she is conscious of it: after all, the possibility of hallucination suggests that we may be (or seem to be) aware of things which do not exist. Furthermore, perceptual experiences, Wolgast claims, have a substantive role within our overall psychological and epistemic economy: among other things, they causally and rationally ground the content of our beliefs. Wolgast's description is by no means uncontroversial, but it constitutes a reasonable sketch of the psychological items philosophers of perception have speculated about over the past few decades.

Having said that, this dissertation is mainly concerned with the question what kind of psychological items perceptual experiences are. In other words, what do we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences? Although this ontological question received some attention by post-Wittgensteinian and post-Rylean philosophers such as Wolgast herself, it fell out of fashion during the final three decades of the Twentieth Century. At least since Helen Steward's influential 1997 book, *The Ontology of Mind*, things have fortunately changed. In particular, the ontology of perception has slowly made its come-back into the philosophical mainstream by means of the work of Brian O'Shaughnessy, Matthew Soteriou, Thomas Crowther, among others. The present dissertation is an attempt to explore a bit farther into the field opened by these philosophers.

In reply to the question as to what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences, writers like O'Shaughnessy and Soteriou have argued that perceptual experiences involve a key processive element: more specifically, they have argued that perceptual experiences are fully or partially constituted by processes of a phenomenally conscious kind. In broad lines, these processive theorists, as I shall call them, highlight paramount features of perceptual phenomena, such as their dynamic and phenomenological character, so as to hold that the ontological category of process is the best candidate to account for psychological items endowed with such features. Although a *processive view* of perceptual experiences has become the orthodox view in the ontology of perception, the goal of this dissertation consists in exploring an alternative

position. On the assumption that there is a substantive distinction to draw between processes and states, I shall outline and partially defend a *stative view* of perceptual experiences, that is, a view according to which perceptual experiences are mental states as opposed to mental processes.

The present project is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 unpacks and critically assesses the main target of this dissertation, a processive view or a view according to which processes of a phenomenally conscious kind are essential to our understanding of perceptual awareness. Chapter 2 formulates the ontological stance I advocate, namely, a stative view. By formulating the main positions I shall be concerned with, I intend to show that a processive view is not obviously compulsory, on the one hand, and, on the other, that a stative view is internally coherent. The following two chapters turn to a positive defense of the stative stance. Chapter 3 argues that the stative conception is better suited than a processive view to account for the identity of perceptual experiences over time. Chapter 4 turns to what is known as the *assertive character* of perceptual experiences: in a nutshell, the thought is that, when a subject is perceptually aware of her surroundings or undergoes perceptual hallucinations, she does not passively entertain a complex mosaic of worldly items; instead, her experiences present her with such items as being the case. The assertive character of perceptual experiences is, I think, a feature best accommodated by a stative view than a processive one. Finally, chapter 5 explores how a stative view may specify the difference between perceptual experiences and beliefs: in this context, I argue that a stative view seems to vindicate state nonconceptualism, that is, the view that perceptual states need not be concept-dependent.

Many people helped me to bring this modest project to fruition. To begin with, I am certainly indebted to all my supervisors throughout the different stages of this process: Ian Phillips, Christopher Peacocke, Rory Madden, and M.G.F. Martin. Paul Snowdon deserves special mention here: he oversaw the project from its very beginning to its final draft; his encouragement was not only philosophical, but also personal. I am also indebted to Mrs. Snowdon and Molly the Cat for their moral and emotional support. Matthew Soteriou has been very generous with his time and his writings have been inspiring. Throughout my four years at UCL,



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## CHAPTER 1

### A PROCESSIONAL VIEW OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

Philosophical discussions about the nature of perception are currently in good shape. Over the past three decades, a great deal of attention has been devoted to questions such as: whether perceptual experiences have representational content, and, if so, how perceptual content should be understood; how veridical and hallucinatory experiences are phenomenologically and epistemologically related; what rational role perceptual experiences have within our psychological economy; how different sensory modalities should be distinguished from each other; and so on. But a basic ontological question has been comparatively overlooked, namely, what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences, or, in other words, what kind of items or entities they are. A stative view holds that perceptual

experiences should be conceived as mental states, that is, as instantiated properties or relations over periods of time. By contrast, a processive view argues that being perceptually aware of the world involves an additional component over and above mental states, namely, processes of a phenomenally conscious kind. Although this position has recently been defended by Brian O'Shaughnessy, Matthew Soteriou, and Thomas Crowther (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2000, ch. 1; Soteriou 2007, 2011, 2013; Crowther 2009a, 2009b, 2010), my goal is to argue that mental processes need not be invoked in order adequately to describe perceptual experiences.

This chapter is devoted to unpacking the subject-matter of this dissertation and outlining a processive view of perceptual experiences as a potential answer to the ontological question I am concerned with. In particular, I partially aim to show that contemporary formulations of the processive view fail to motivate the introduction of perceptual processes into our ontology. This task is divided into five sections. First, I turn to Zeno Vendler's seminal discussion of the ontology of seeing in order to illustrate the ontological question I am concerned with, on the one hand, and, on the other, to outline the problematic relationship between a stative and a processive view of perceptual experiences. At this stage, I rely on the broad understanding of states and processes which Vendler himself exploits. The following three sections are devoted to a critical assessment of the processive stances developed by O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou, and Crowther, respectively. This survey aims to specify the notion of process essential to my targets and critically to assess their motivations for positing such items. Finally, I summarize the foregoing discussion and briefly describe how my defence of a stative view will unfold.

## I. VENDLER ON PERCEPTUAL STATES AND PERCEPTUAL PROCESSES

The import of a stative and a processive view of perceptual experiences will fully emerge only as I specify the notions of mental state and mental process throughout chapters 1 and 2. In this section, my aim is to introduce a stative and a processive view of perceptual experience in the context of their problematic relationship. At this level of generality, the main point is to highlight how a processive conception

threatens the intuitive and ontologically austere picture of perception provided by the stative view.

For the sake of simplicity, I shall only deal with perceptual experiences in their visual modality. Again, I shall use Zeno Vendler's remarks on the analysis of seeing (cf. Vendler 1957) as the backdrop of this discussion. To begin with, then, let's consider an example inspired by the closing lines of Vendler's essay. Imagine that a vigilant sailor (call him Jim) stands on deck and looks out for a particular star on a cloudy night: as the sky clears up, Jim spots the celestial body, and, as a result of that, his gaze remains fixed on it from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ ; more specifically, he watches the star during that period of time. To watch the star from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , he has to see it from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , or at least during considerable stages of that temporal span. Again, if Jim uninterruptedly sees a star from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , he must visually experience it or be aware of it during that period of time: if his visual field remains fixed during that time, the relevant star will look or visually appear a certain way to him. This description of Jim's conscious life is no doubt schematic, but it highlights the sort of situation where perceptual experiences play an important role.

The previous scenario involves at least three important perceptual notions, namely, watching, seeing, and experiencing. In this dissertation, I follow Crowther's distinction between watching and seeing (cf. Crowther 2009a, 2009b). Activities like watching and listening are forms of perceptual attention. They are things a subject may willingly do: as such, a subject may watch or listen to something carefully, intently, carelessly, absent-mindedly, and so on. Watching and listening are active or agential, at least in the minimal sense that 'such goings-on are things that agents do, rather than things like digestion or resuscitation that merely go on in agents or that merely happen to them.' (Crowther, 2009b, 173) Meanwhile, perceiving is passive insofar as it merely happens to a subject: as Crowther succinctly puts it, 'in perception we are passive and at the mercy of our immediate environment' (Crowther, 2009b, 173) It is natural to think that watching piggybags on perception proper: while a subject may perceive things without attending to them, she has to perceive something in order to attend to it.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation is fundamentally concerned with the basic conscious or experiential

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<sup>1</sup> Although I take it more or less for granted here, the idea of perception without attention is not wholly uncontroversial.

phenomenon at the heart of perception, as opposed to the more cognitive-laden phenomenon of perceptual attention: for this reason, although they tend to play an important role in perceptual scenarios such as the one above described, I set watching and other forms of perceptual monitoring aside.

Turning now to the relationship between seeing and experiencing, Vendler draws an important distinction between two senses of seeing: while seeing sometimes refers to an instantaneous or durationless happening – that is, an achievement which consists in a subject's spotting or making perceptual contact with the world; it may also refer to temporally extended occurrences, to relations of perceptual awareness between a subject and her surroundings over a period of time (cf. Vendler 1957). The above example readily illustrates this distinction. First, durationless seeing figures as Jim's spotting the star: as durationless or instantaneous, that achievement does not occupy an instant of time. But, secondly, there is a sense of seeing in which Jim does see the bright star during a period of time, that is,  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$ . Of course, the difference between both kinds of seeing concerns their respective temporal structures, the way in which they fill time: in the first sense, seeing is an instantaneous or durationless occurrence; in the second one, it is temporally extended. Vendler suggests a natural way of understanding the relationship between both senses: whereas temporally protracted seeing is a form of perceptual awareness proper, instantaneous seeing stands for the very achievement of becoming perceptually aware of something. They are no doubt intimately related: after all, standing in a relation of perceptual awareness to the world for a period of time typically presupposes the perceptual achievement of coming to be in such an experiential relation.

The previous distinction helps to clarify the relationship between seeing and experiencing. To begin with, I take it to be more or less clear that instantaneous seeing and experiencing are not equivalent: becoming aware of something is not a way of being aware of something<sup>2</sup>, more or less in the same way that starting to walk is not walking, or that to figure out the solution to a mathematical problem (in the 'Eureka!' sense) is not to believe that such-and-such a problem has such-and-such a solution, etc. When Jim spots a bright star,  $t_1$  is the

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<sup>2</sup> A terminological note: in this dissertation, I use 'experiencing' and 'being aware of' as equivalent.

first moment of time at which he is visually aware of it, not an instant at which he makes contact with it – after all, spotting or making contact with the star is durationless. Within the temporal dimension, achievements like spotting an object or winning a race are analogous to the spatial limits of an object: just as the spatial limits of an item do not occupy space, durationless occurrences or achievements do not occupy time (cf. Crowther 2011). Although achievements may be said to happen or occur at times (e.g. 'I scored a goal at 5pm'), they do not take time.

By contrast, seeing the world during a period of time involves being visually aware of it during that time. Thus understood, seeing is closely related to experiencing. But there is also an important difference to bear in mind: while a subject only sees items which exist in her surrounding, she may have perceptual experiences of actual as well as merely possible objects.<sup>3</sup> The thought behind this distinction is that visual experiences constitute a necessary but non-sufficient part of seeing: a necessary part because they pick up on the distinctive conscious component of perceptual phenomena; a non-sufficient one, meanwhile, because experiences could be either veridical or hallucinatory. Seeing is by definition a veridical or successful informational transaction between a subject and her surroundings.<sup>4</sup> As such, every case of seeing involves experiencing, but not every case of experiencing entails seeing: although visual awareness is not identical to seeing, it plays a crucial role in our understanding of what it means to see the world.<sup>5</sup>

So much for the relationship between watching, seeing, and experiencing. As previously anticipated, this dissertation is mainly concerned with the notion of perceptual experience: more specifically, I am concerned with the basic ontological question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences – that is, what kind of items perceptual experiences are. In addition to illustrating the sort of

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3 For distinctions along similar lines, cf. Wolgast 1960; Lowe 1996, 92ff.; Crane 2005/2011.

4 I take an informational or causal understanding of perception to be something of a commonplace in the philosophical literature. For statements and discussions, cf. Armstrong 1968, 209, 255; Pitcher 1971, 64, 113-30; Dretske 1981; O'Shaughnessy 2000, 38. This stance is not equivalent to a causal theory of perception (cf. Grice 1961), at least in the sense that it is not committed to a reductive analysis of perception in purely causal terms.

5 Compare here Michael Tye's remark on the relationship between visual experiences, seeing, and looks: 'Seeing something entails the presence of a visual experience. I cannot see *X* unless *X* looks some way to me; and for *X* to look some way to me, it must cause in me a visual experience. So, to return to the example of the wine taster, since he is seeing the wine in the glass, he must be subject to a visual experience.' (Tye 2003, 34-5)

scenario where perceptual experiences play a crucial role, the example of Jim the sailor also helps sketching two prominent views on this matter. Vendler himself would, I think, endorse a stative ontology of perceptual experiences, a position which may be seen as a natural extension of Wittgenstein's and Ryle's critiques of thoughts, among other mental items, as shadowy or ghostly entities<sup>6</sup>: indeed, a key motivation behind this analysis of seeing is Vendler's belief that nothing needs to happen in a subject's mind when she is perceptually aware of her surroundings, in the sense that no mental processes need to be invoked to describe the mental life of someone like Jim during  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$  (cf. Vendler 1957, 159-60). My overall case against the processive view may likewise be framed within this historical tradition: after all, the main worry I seek to press against theorists like O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou, and Crowther, is that they burden a stative understanding of perceptual experiences with a problematic and unnecessary mental ontology.

As previously noted, when Jim spots a bright star, he is not visually aware of it: from  $t_1$  onwards, he is aware of it; but the spotting itself is a durationless occurrence – that is, an achievement or an instantaneous event – which draws a line between what Jim's experiential life is like at  $t_0$  and what it is like from  $t_1$  on. Visual awareness kicks in only when Jim sees the luminous object during  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$ : during this period of time, Jim visually experiences the star. That said, what is involved in Jim's being so aware? What exactly happens or obtains when Jim is perceptually conscious of his surroundings? Or again, to put the same question more bluntly, what kind of things (in the broadest possible sense of the term) are Jim's visual experiences? Vendler directly addresses this issue:

A sailor on deck looking ahead remarks, "It is pitch dark, I don't see anything." After a while, "Now I see a star." We ask him, "What has happened?" "The cloud's gone." "But what else happened?" "Nothing else." Of course many things happened in the world and in the sailor. But his seeing is not one of them. (Vendler 1957, 160)

In this passage, Vendler explicitly recognizes the existence of very complex physical and neuro-biological stories behind every simple perceptual scenario. To describe what happens when Jim perceives a star, it will not merely do to identify

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<sup>6</sup> On this point, the *loci classici* are of course Ryle 1949 and Wittgenstein 1953. For subsequent statements of these critiques, cf. Ayer 1963; Kenny 1989; Travis 2001.

what material substances and properties are involved in the relevant case, namely, Jim himself, a star, the latter's luminous quality, etc. It is also necessary to provide a physical story concerning how information about an object far away and possibly long gone may reach our planet in general and Jim in particular. Again, a neuro-biological description should specify how that information is processed by Jim's eyes down into the primary visual cortex. Vendler does not deliver such stories, but it is not his philosophical responsibility to do so. In the present context, his main concern is our understanding of conscious perception as a mental phenomenon, not as a physical or a neuro-biological one: that is, our understanding of such a phenomenon in terms of those general metaphysical categories familiar to philosophers (e.g. substance, property, process, state, etc.). When he says that nothing happens in the sailor's mind while perceiving the star, Vendler is by no means denying the existence of perceptual awareness: what he contests is the propriety of conceiving Jim's (or anybody's) perceptual experiences as mental happenings of a processive kind – in other words, as mental processes.<sup>7</sup> According to Vendler, temporally extended seeing – that is, being perceptually aware of worldly items or states of affairs – should be understood as the obtaining of a mental state (cf. Vendler 1957, 155-7). To get a grip on the antagonistic views thus introduced by Vendler, it is necessary to pause on the metaphysical notions of process and state.<sup>8</sup>

In broad lines, processes and states pick up on worldly items with different temporal structures: that is, items which persist or fill time in different ways (cf. Vendler 1957, 143-9; Steward 1997, 73). To a first approximation, this temporal

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7 It is worth noting here that, although unpopular, an eliminativist view of perceptual experiences has been endorsed in the past (cf. Farrell 1950; Wolgast 1960; Hacker 1987; and Byrne 2009). A comparison of Vendler and Byrne is specially instructive: while Byrne denies the existence of perceptual experience because the idea of perceptual events of a processive kind is problematic, Vendler more lucidly appreciates that a successful critique of mental processes does not, strictly speaking, undermine the notion of perceptual experience – such a critique would only show that perceptual experiences ought not to be conceived in processive terms.

8 Apart from Vendler's discussion, these notions have a venerable history in the philosophical literature. There is a precedent at least in Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Nichomachean Ethics* (cf. Barnes 1984). In modern times, interest in the process-state divide has been renewed by the seminal contributions of Ryle, Vendler, and Anthony Kenny in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of action (cf. Ryle 1954; Vendler 1957; Kenny 1963, ch. 8). Since then, there has been a wave of contributions in the interface of linguistics and philosophy (cf. Comrie 1976; Taylor 1977; Mourelatos 1978; Dowty 1979; Rothstein 2007; among many others). Meanwhile, the distinction has slowly made its come-back into hard-core philosophies of mind, of perception, and action (cf. Steward 1997; Soteriou 2007, 2011, 2013; Crowther 2009a, 2009b).



distinction may be expressed as follows: whereas processes *occur* or *unfold*, states only *obtain*; whereas there are only parts of a process at each moment before its completion, states exist wholly present, not only as parts, throughout the moments of time they obtain. Vendler illustrates this distinction by comparing the processes of running and writing, on the one hand, and, on the other, the state of knowing:

[...] running, writing, and the like are processes going on in time, i.e., roughly, that they consist of successive phases following one another in time. Indeed, the man who is running lifts up his right leg one moment, drops it the next, then lifts his other leg, drops it, and so on. But although it can be true of a subject that he knows something at a given moment or for a certain period, knowing and its kin are not processes going on in time. It may be the case that I know geography now, but this does not mean that a process of knowing geography is going on at present consisting of phases succeeding one another in time. (Vendler 1957, 144-5)

Indeed, running and writing are uncontroversially processes: they are not instantaneous, but temporally protracted; again, they go on or unfold. This point may also be put by saying that such processes have temporal phases or parts: when a subject runs or writes, her running or writing is not given as a whole at each of the instants throughout which she runs or writes; such processes come into existence progressively until they reach an end when the subject stops running or writing. States, by contrast, do not share the same mode of existence. Vendler grants that they are temporally protracted: 'one can know or believe something, love or dominate somebody, for a short or long period.' (Vendler 1957, 146) Hence, the distinction between processes and states is not a matter of temporal duration: the crucial point is that, although instances of both categories persist over time, only processes go on. Vendler's suggestion seems to be that, unlike processes, states exist in time by being wholly present at each moment they obtain: "A loved somebody from  $t_1$  to  $t_2$ " means that *any* instant between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  A loved that person.' (Vendler 1957, 149).<sup>9</sup>

With the previous distinction in place, the view of seeing endorsed by Vendler may be formulated as a position according to which perceptual awareness

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout the philosophical literature, processes and states tend to be described in different ways by different philosophers. That said, Vendler's framework nicely dovetails with the one invoked by David Armstrong (cf. Armstrong 1968, 130-1). I shall say more about Armstrong in the next chapter, since I take his theory of perception as a template for a stative view of perceptual experiences.

should be conceived as a condition instantiated by a subject for a certain period of time: perceptual experiences do not go on, they only obtain. Correspondingly, instantaneous seeing should be understood as a subject's acquiring of a particular kind of mental state (cf. Vendler 1957, 158). By contrast, a processive conception models perceptual experiences as mental processes: they have temporal parts, they unfold or go on. If this view is along the right lines, instantaneous seeing would accordingly refer to the beginning of a mental process.

Vendler takes different stances on those two views of perceptual experience: he endorses a stative view and rejects a processive one. Now, when it comes to specify the problematic relationship between these two positions, Vendler's discussion turns out to be of limited use at least for two reasons. First, it presents the notions of process and state as exclusive ones: accordingly, it also suggests that a processive and a stative view of perceptual experiences are mutually exclusive. But, as it will become clear in the subsequent sections, the relationship between both ontological categories is more complex than that. Second, Vendler's case explicitly relies on a set of considerations intended to show that perceptual experiences are not processes and, at the same time, that they are states. However, such remarks fail to undermine a processive view. At a crucial stage of his critique, Vendler writes:

But seeing cannot be a process. "What are you doing?" can never, in good English, be answered by "I am seeing..." Thus notwithstanding the fact that one might see something for a long period, it does not mean that he "is seeing" that thing for any period, yet it remains true that he sees it at all moments during that period. In addition, "deliberately" or "carefully" fail to describe or misdescribe seeing, as no one can be accused of or held responsible for having seen something, though one can be accused of or held responsible for having looked at or watched something. Thus seeing is not an action which is "done" or "performed" at all. (Vendler 1957, 155-6)

Vendler makes at least two points: first, that a claim of the form 'I am seeing...' does not suitably answer a question of the form 'What are you doing?'; and, secondly, that such claims do not allow for adverbial modifiers such as 'carefully', 'carelessly', and so on. Writing at the intersection between philosophy and linguistics, he often brings claims about linguistic practice to bear on psychological and ontological issues, or again, formulates psychological and

ontological claims in terms of linguistic usage. But, even though the previous remarks superficially concern the relationship between different types of linguistic expressions, they do contain a non-linguistic, philosophical message, namely, that perceptual phenomena should not be conceived as things we do or things we can be held responsible for – that is, as actions. In saying this, however, Vendler overlooks the fact that a processive view is not obviously committed to the claim that perceptual experiences are actions: as stressed by Crowther in relation to the distinction between seeing and watching, one may argue that perceptual processes are not agential, in the sense that they are not things a subject does, but things which merely happen to her; after all, a processive view is primarily committed to the thought that, like running (agential) or digesting (non-agential), perceptual experiences go on or unfold. A processive and an agential account of perceptual experiences are clearly different philosophical positions: correspondingly, a critique of an agential stance does not automatically target a processive one.<sup>10</sup>

Vendler, I think, suggests a better way of understanding the problematic relationship between a processive and a stative view in remarks peripheral to the above critique. In a passage I previously quoted, he claims that mental happenings of a processive kind are not required in order to describe perceptual phenomena – say, the case where Jim sees a star for a period of time. For Vendler, all we crucially need in order to describe Jim's experiential life is the notion of perceptual state. In this context, I suspect, the relevant thought is not that the notion of perceptual process is incoherent, or, again, that it is incompatible with that of perceptual state. The crucial point seems to be that, when it comes to describe everyday experiential scenarios, we need not invoke perceptual processes: the phenomenon of perceptual awareness is suitably captured by the notion of perceptual state. According to this line of reasoning, perceptual awareness over time is a temporally extended state which subjects realize by going through a multitude of sub-personal (i.e. physical or neuro-biological) processes and states: conceiving perceptual awareness itself as a mental process, however, threatens to turn seeing into a mystery, just like a non-stative analysis of knowing threatens to turn a knowledge-state into 'something ghostly' underpinning physical and neuro-

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<sup>10</sup> Vendler's mistake is similar to one which, according to Crowther, Ryle 1949 commits, namely, to conflate agential process with process simpliciter (cf. Crowther 2009b, 176).

biological reality (cf. Vendler 1957, 158-9). The problem with perceptual processes is thus that they involve an ontological commitment which seems unnecessary. An obvious reply to this claim is that, as far as ontological commitments are concerned, perceptual processes are not any more demanding than physical processes (e.g. digesting, boiling) or characteristically intentional activities (e.g. running, writing). But, as I shall argue in the next section, this line of reply only seems plausible because we have not fully grasped the import of the mental processes thereby invoked: after elucidating the relevant notion of process a bit further, it will become clear that the perceptual processes which O'Shaughnessy, among others, endorse, constitute significant additions to our general ontology over and above physical processes.

The foregoing considerations suggest that a stative and a processive view are not mutually exclusive: as far as I can see, a processive view could complement a stative one, or vice versa. What Vendler's text hints at is a tension between an ontologically austere and self-sufficient ontology of experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, a more robust and problematic one. Even though perceptual experiences might be conceived in terms of mental states as well as mental processes, a stative theorist could argue that the ontological framework introduced by the processive theorist involves a substantive and unnecessary ontological commitment. In a nutshell, the stative complaint might be just this: even if perceptual processes turn out to be conceivable, why would we want to believe in them? This worry is a key guiding theme of the present dissertation.

In this section, I have only voiced the thought that a stative view of perceptual experience is more ontologically austere than a processive one. To support it, I have to say more about perceptual processes and states, a task I spread out over chapters 1 and 2. All I have intended to do here is to present a blue-print I intend to flesh out throughout the following sections.

## II. O'SHAUGHNESSY ON THE NECESSITY OF EXPERIENTIAL FLUX

In the remaining sections, I survey contemporary formulations of the processive view, and partially argue for the claim that none of them forces perceptual processes on us. To begin with, I unpack and critically assess O'Shaughnessy's proposal. This step is crucial, for Soteriou and Crowther may be taken to gloss and elaborate on that account.

For O'Shaughnessy, perception and action are varieties of experience: as such, he does not think that all experiences are perceptual. This dissertation is only concerned with the perceptual variety, though. Within this context, a good-starting point is the fact that, according to O'Shaughnessy, a crucial feature of perceptual experiences *qua* experiential is their essential or necessary dynamic character. Thus, he claims that, '[c]haracteristically the contents of experience are in flux, and necessarily experience itself is in flux, being essentially occurrent in nature' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 43); or again, that '[i]t is not the mere existence of flux [...] in the case of experience that is distinctive: it is the *necessity* of flux.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44) This characterization highlights two things: first, the dynamic or changing nature of perceptual experiences; and, secondly, the necessity of that character. The dynamic component translates into a processive conception of perceptual experiences, a view which O'Shaughnessy formulates as follows:

Yet even when experience is not changing in type or content, it still changes in another respect: it is constantly *renewed*, a new sector of itself is there and then *taking place*. This is because experiences are events (glimpsing, picture-painting) or processes (walking, picture-painting), and each momentary new element of any given experience is a further happening or *occurrence* (by contrast with (say) the steady continuation through time of one's knowing that 9 and 5 make 14). Thus, even if I am staring fixedly at some unchanging material object, such staring is not merely a *continuous existent* across time, it is an activity and therefore also a *process*, and thus occurrently renewed in each instant in which it continues to exist. In short, the domain of experience is essentially a domain of occurrences, of processes and events. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 42)

This statement aligns with what I have already said about the processive view. According to O'Shaughnessy, perceptual experiences are temporally extended events or happenings: such events are temporally structured in the sense

that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end; again, these happenings are of a processive kind, that is, they go on for a certain period of time. Thus, if Jim sees a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , a perceptual event takes place in virtue of a mental process extending from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ .

In the previous quote, it is also clear that O'Shaughnessy takes the notion of perceptual process to be intimately related to that of perceptual event: after all, he claims that perceptual awareness may be conceived in terms of processes and events. Although both ontological categories are not equivalent, they are closely related. A fairly popular take on this point is that events are related to processes via the notion of constitution: just as count-quantifiable, spatial entities (e.g. a statue, a tree, etc.) are constituted by mass-quantifiable stuff (e.g. wood, bronze, etc.), certain events should be conceived as count-quantifiable, temporally extended items which are made of or constituted by mass-quantifiable processes (cf. Armstrong 1968, 131; Steward 1997, 94-7; Crowther 2011). While temporally extended events may be understood as temporal particulars – that is, they exist in time and are count-quantifiable – processes may be conceived as the matter or stuff out of which such particulars are constituted. This suggestion is attractive because it captures intuitive contrasts between the notions of process and events: processes, not events, go on; process-talk allows for adjective or adverbial qualifications which event-talk does not – for example, the humming of my computer may be persistent or continuous (cf. Steward 1997, 95); unlike processes, events do not stop but only come to an end (cf. Steward 1997, 95); events are count-quantifiable – we can speak, for example, of one or two songs, of one or two battles – whereas processes are only mass-quantifiable – there is not one or two hummings, one or two runnings, but only more or less humming, more or less running (cf. Steward 1997, 96-7; Crowther 2011). More importantly, this line of thought seems to be endorsed by O'Shaughnessy himself:

[...] when a process comes to a halt (at whatever point) an event is at that moment realized (a dissolving, a skid, an ascent), so that we may say at each new instant  $t_x$  of an unfolding process that a potential event enduring from  $t_0$ – $t_x$  has occurred by the time  $t_x$ . [...] Thus, the process 'lays down' more and more of an event the same in kind as itself, and may in this regard be taken to be the very stuff or phenomenal matter of events the

same in kind as itself. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44)<sup>11</sup>

According to this passage, events come into existence only when processes conclude: whereas an ongoing process is only an incomplete event, a complete event is a process that has already concluded; in other words, these events are not fully realized for as long as their corresponding processes go on. This suggests that, although intimately related, events and processes constitute different ontological categories. Finally, O'Shaughnessy caps the previous passage by saying that perceptual processes are 'the very stuff or phenomenal matter of events'.

That said, the relevant processive view also contains a modal qualification which is crucial for understanding what kind of perceptual processes, and hence events, are at stake. O'Shaughnessy claims that perceptual experiences are necessarily or essentially dynamic: in other words, they are 'occurrent to the core' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 49). To highlight this point, he draws a line between experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, non-experiences or 'the sector that encompasses the relatively stable unexperienced mental foundation (e.g. cognitive, evaluative, etc.) upon which experience occurs.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 42-3) The relevant contrast is not one between a dynamic and a static sector of the mind. After all, changes can take place among non-experiential states: for example, our beliefs or memories can change over time. Hence, the crucial point is not that perceptual experiences involve change, for non-experiential states do so as well: rather, the thought is that experiences are processive down to their ultimate parts: no matter how you go about analysing perceptual awareness, you always end up with processes. By thus glossing the processive view, O'Shaughnessy comes to share a claim suggested by Vendler, namely, that perceptual processes constitute a substantive addition to a stative ontology of perceptual experiences.

As previously mentioned, Vendler fails to show that a processive and a stative view are mutually incompatible, but only that a stative theorist need not commit herself to the existence of perceptual processes. Now, throughout the

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<sup>11</sup> A bit earlier, he also writes: 'when a process terminates, an event of the same type is its necessary residue. If I have been looking steadily at a painting for ninety seconds, if for ninety seconds such a processive activity was going on, then at the end of that interval it became true that I had looked at that painting, it became true that an act-event of that type and duration had occurred.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 43)

defence of his processive stance, O'Shaughnessy raises the question whether perceptual experiences could allow for a dual ontological analysis, that is, whether they could be analysed in stative as well as processive terms (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2000, 46). This possibility is suggested by the fact that physical as well as psychological albeit non-experiential processes may be so analysed (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44-7). For example, certain movements across space may be conceived as processes constituted by objects standing in certain states: 'constituting a process like moving out of states like being at a position in space at a particular time, is not *in competition with* constituting such a process out of parts the same in kind as itself.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 45) The point is not just that either analysis is acceptable: the thought is that it may be necessary to invoke both process-parts and state-parts in order to capture the kind of events or changes that certain movements across space are. Again, some non-experiential phenomena (e.g. certain instances of forgetting, coming to understand, or deciding) may be processes with states at their core.<sup>12</sup> Of course, physical and non-experiential change will not always be processive: for, while O'Shaughnessy takes a process to be the kind of change which exhibits a certain form of continuity or homogeneity among its constituting parts, he also thinks that changes like movement across space, forgetting, and deciding, may be discontinuous. Physical and non-experiential changes involve a processive and a stative analysis only when they are temporally continuous.

But what about experiential processes? Could they also be analysed in terms of process-parts as well as state-parts? According to O'Shaughnessy, they could not: he argues that psychological states cannot be constitutive components of perceptual experiences (cf. O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44, 47), and it should be relatively clear that this negative claim is related to the necessary character of experiential flux: after all, if experiences are irreducibly processive – that is, if they are

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<sup>12</sup> Here is the template for the analysis of non-experiential processes: 'In all such cases we are able to single out a psychological state which lies at the heart of the process. Indeed, the guiding principle seems to be, that if we are to so much as specify a non-experiential psychological process, the way to go about the task is first by specifying a particular psychological state, second positing an event consisting in the change of that state over an interval of time, and finally through positing continuity as the mode in which the change is realized.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 47) Again, since temporally extended events and processes are closely related and states may be understood as instantiations of properties or relations, the present understanding of processes is germane to a conception of events as property-exemplifications (cf. Kim 1976).



processive by necessity or occurrent to the core – they could not be analysed into stative components; in other words, mental states cannot underpin experiences because these psychological phenomena are necessarily processive. O'Shaughnessy goes as far as saying that the absence of such underpinning states constitutes 'a fundamental *differentia* of the whole experience genus' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44): indeed, states may lie at the heart of physical and non-experiential processes, but that is so only because such changes are not processive through and through. According to this position, meanwhile, there are no experiential states.

Two remarks are in order here. First, O'Shaughnessy's perceptual processes would constitute a substantive addition vis-à-vis a stative ontology, in the sense that his processive view is committed to the existence of items a stative framework would not automatically capture – after all, the relevant processes cannot be reduced into experiential states. Secondly, this version of the processive view is to some extent more radical than the one derived from Vendler's discussion. In the last section, I noted that Vendler attempts to drive a wedge between a processive and a stative view of seeing: all he manages to do is, however, critically to assess an agential view of seeing, that is, a conception according to which temporally extended seeing is something we do rather than something which merely happens to us. Having said that, I went on to develop a suggestion hinted at by Vendler, namely, that a processive and a stative view may be thought of as complementary positions: more specifically, the thought is that, since perceptual processes are less ontologically austere than perceptual states, the processive view may build on the stative view. Now, if Vendler's understanding of the relationship between these two ontologies is taken to be defined by his most explicit line of reasoning, it would thereby cohere with O'Shaughnessy's intentions: in that case, both philosophers would seek to frame the stative and the processive view as mutually exclusive options. But, as already pointed out, Vendler's official take on that relationship is defective. If what he thought is instead informed by his more peripheral remarks, it should be clear that O'Shaughnessy follows a less ecumenical path. Vendler apparently thinks that the processive ontology of seeing unnecessarily builds on a stative one: so, although these positions stand in a rather delicate relationship, they are not mutually exclusive. By contrast, O'Shaughnessy

clearly pursues a route where perceptual processes are not reducible into or otherwise related to perceptual states: according to him, there are no such states. In other words, he thinks that a processive and a stative view are not compatible with each other. This is, I think, a notable difference between Vendler's and O'Shaughnessy's understandings of the relationship between the two relevant mental ontologies. In the subsequent sections, I shall argue that Soteriou's and Crowther's takes on the same issue are ecumenical ones, even though they are to a significant degree different from Vendler's. For the time being, the crucial point is that O'Shaughnessy endorses a relatively extreme version of a processive view: hence, it is necessary to determine whether the reasons behind his position are good ones.

As far as I can see, O'Shaughnessy is mainly driven by two motivations: on the one hand, he thinks that a head-on analysis of the concept of experience vindicates experiential processes over experiential states; and, on the other, he invokes a thought-experiment – viz. a case of 'total mental freeze' – the purpose of which is to highlight the necessary dynamic character of perceptual phenomena and, accordingly, the obvious appeal of a processive view. In both cases, O'Shaughnessy thinks that the correctness of his processive view counts against a stative position. By critically assessing these motivations, I aim to show that he neither proves his own view right, nor undermines the notion of perceptual states.

To begin with, then, O'Shaughnessy argues that perceptual experiences could not be conceptually analysed or anatomized in terms of temporally continuous transitions from state to state, but only in terms of processes. To the extent that he focuses on undermining the stative view, his critical strategy is by and large negative. He writes:

[...] one is inclined to believe that (say) hearing a sound consists in the obtaining of a relation, that of awareness, between a mind and a sound. Accordingly, one might suppose that there exists an experience which is the realization in time of a state, viz. the relation of awareness between a mind and a sound. This is to strictly model 'He hears the sound' upon 'He touches the wall'. But 'He touches the wall' is ambiguous between an event consisting in the establishing of a relation, and the relation itself. By contrast, 'He hears the sound' exhibits no such ambiguity: it describes an event, and never designates a relation. *A fortiori* the event of hearing a sound does not consist in the realization at or over a time of a relation of hearing the sound. This event occurs at an instant if the sound is instantaneous, and over an interval if the sound is temporally extended; then in the

latter case it will need to be renewed instant by succeeding instant, as happens when listening is going on. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 49)

In the present context, O'Shaughnessy conceives 'relations of awareness' as states in which subjects may stand relative to their surroundings: this is, I suspect, why he denies that perceptual experiences pick up on such relations. The question I thus have to evaluate here is whether O'Shaughnessy conclusively shows that the notion of perceptual experience should necessarily be analysed in terms of mental processes. My answer will be negative, and, as a result of that, I conclude that the present motivation is unsatisfactory.

Turning to the previous question, it is helpful to examine constructions of the following form:

- (i) S perceives O (as F),

where 'perceives' could be replaced by 'sees', 'hears', 'smells', etc.

- (ii) O appears to S (as F),

where 'appears... (as F)' could be replaced by 'looks (like)', 'sounds (like)', 'smells (like)', etc.

If there are any linguistic constructions we use to pick up on perceptual experiences, (i) and (ii) seem good candidates.

O'Shaughnessy specifically tries to drive an asymmetry between statements about hearing and touch. According to him, the reference of a perceptual statement like

- (i\*) He touches the wall,

is ambiguous between an instantaneous event – the touching of a wall at an

instant – and a state – that is, the state in which a subject stands vis-à-vis the object (i.e. the wall) he is in direct contact with. The general suggestion is then that one could apply a similar analysis to statements about perceptual phenomena of different sensory modalities. To undercut this move, O'Shaughnessy argues that a statement of auditory perception, such as

(i\*\*) He hears the sound,

is not ambiguous: on the contrary, it unequivocally points to a single reading where the subject's hearing should be understood in processive terms. Although O'Shaughnessy does not generalize this claim to statements of other sensory modalities, one would expect him to do so for the sake of the processive view.

The previous line of reasoning, however, does not seem convincing enough at least for three reasons. First, by conceding that statements of tactile perception and those of auditory perception could be analysed in different ways, O'Shaughnessy suggests that different conceptual analyses could in principle underpin each sensory modality: but if that is the case, it is unclear whether statements of, say, visual perception mirror that of tactile perception, that of auditory perception, or a completely different model. O'Shaughnessy himself does not throw any lights on this matter. As such, even if his analysis of (i\*\*) is correct and thereby supports a processive view, it does not follow that one could automatically infer a processive view of visual, gustatory, or olfactory experiences.

Secondly, it is not obvious that O'Shaughnessy's analysis of (i\*\*) is correct. In particular, it is unclear why statements of hearing lack different readings. Vendler's and Ryle's influential works suggest that statements about seeing may identify: on the one hand, an instantaneous event, e.g. the spotting of an object in one's surroundings; or, on the other, a state (what O'Shaughnessy calls a relation of awareness) of the perceiver relative to the objects of perception (cf. Ryle 1954; Vendler 1957). Thus, it is natural to advance the same sort of analysis for (i\*) and (i\*\*).

Finally, one could also target O'Shaughnessy's swift inference to the claim

that statements about auditory experiences refer to experiential processes. In the above quote, statements of auditory perception refer to experiential processes only thanks to a principle according to which the temporal structure of mental attitudes mirrors that of their respective objects. According to this principle, perceptual experiences are instantaneous or protracted depending on whether what is perceived has that temporal structure: 'the event of hearing a sound [...] occurs at an instant if the sound is instantaneous, and over an interval if the sound is temporally extended'. This claim, however, rests on a controversial principle to the effect that features of represented items may be ascribed to the corresponding vehicles of representation: as Daniel Dennett has persuasively argued, it is far from clear whether the temporal structure of what a subject perceives shapes the temporal structure of her perceptual attitudes (cf. Dennett 1991). This is certainly a delicate issue on which I cannot elaborate here. But, for present purposes, it is enough to flag the complication: this alone, I think, shows that O'Shaughnessy's reliance on perceptual processes is controversial.

In short, O'Shaughnessy's conceptual analysis of perceptual experiences does not seem compulsory. A second motivation behind his processive view concerns the alleged difference between 'the characters and conditions of identity' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 44) of experiences and non-experiences. The main point is expressed by means of a thought experiment which O'Shaughnessy repeatedly exploits:

[...] the domain of experience is essentially a domain of occurrences, of processes and events. In this regard we should contrast the domain of experience with the other great half of the mind: the non-experiential half. That is, the sector that encompasses the relatively stable unexperienced mental foundation (e.g. cognitive, evaluative, etc.) upon which experience occurs. While many of the non-experiential contents of this domain could continue in existence when all mental phenomena had frozen in their tracks, say (fancifully) in a being in suspended animation at 0° Absolute, those in the experiential domain could not. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 42-3)

In this thought experiment, the mental life of a subject is frozen in a way which is intended to highlight different circumstances or conditions under which experiences and non-experiences may exist: unlike experiences (e.g. perceptual experiences), non-experiences (e.g. beliefs) could exist in a frozen mental life, that

is, a life where no mental changes take place. In the light of their distinctive dynamic character, experiences are naturally classified as processes. As stressed by O'Shaughnessy, the relevant psychological contrast is one between a sector of the mind that is necessarily occurrent or dynamically irreducible and a sector of the mind that is ultimately reducible to non-dynamic elements (i.e. state-parts).

An initial worry about this fiction is whether it is actually obvious that one could ascribe non-experiential states (say, beliefs) to a subject in total mental freeze – after all, in the realm of imaginable possibilities, this fiction comes close to a case of brain death, where it is not implausible to deny cognitive states to the relevant subject. Furthermore, the uses of 'can'-terms are complex enough to raise the question whether the sense in which a subject in total mental freeze *could* have cognitive states is the same sense as that in which a sleeper or otherwise unconscious person *could*. I admit, though, that this line of attack is extremely delicate, so I present it only as a tentative suggestion.

I shall focus here on a relatively simpler objection. For the sake of the argument, I grant that a subject in mental freeze could have a non-experiential life while lacking an experiential one. Now, even if that is the case, it does not necessarily show that perceptual experiences are mental processes. This thought could be supported in two ways. First, one could hold that O'Shaughnessy's thought experiment does not show that experiences are ultimately processive, but only that experiences and non-experiences constitute different kinds of states – that is, kinds of states which have different identity conditions. One would certainly have to motivate this line of reasoning, but it seems a live option.

Secondly, one could hold that O'Shaughnessy's fiction does not show that experiences are mental processes, but only that they somehow depend on processes of different kinds. In a slogan, the relevant case only shows: no changes whatsoever, no experiences. But it fails to show, first, that there is a one-on-one mapping between experiences and processes, and, secondly, that the relevant processes are of a specific mental kind. To secure a processive conception, O'Shaughnessy needs to secure these two points: since his thought experiment fails to do so, it also fails to secure a processive conception.

To illustrate the previous remarks, let's assume that perceptual experiences are mental states, and then determine whether one could still make sense of O'Shaughnessy's mental-freeze case. The subjects of these experiences have bodies which, in turn, implement sensory systems from which perceptual experiences will ensue: as such, one could reasonably suppose that a complex number of physiological processes take place in the relevant perceivers. On the basis of these stipulations, the suggestion is that the case of total mental freeze could be accommodated by a stative understanding of perceptual experiences. The reason why this is so is that, although perceptual experiences would not be processes, they could be states that in turn depend on processes of a different kind. The idea of a process-dependent state is not really exotic, for there are familiar examples of mental states which depend on physiological processes: for instance, being in pain or feeling anxious are mental states that depend on physiological changes. In these cases, no mental processes (say, pain- or anxiety-processes) are involved. Since the possibility of total freeze would not only obliterate subjective processes, but also subjective process-dependent states, a subject could thereby fail to have perceptual experiences not only when the latter are conceived as processes, but also when conceived as process-dependent states. Although the general notion of process would still have a role to play in the relevant scenario, it does not follow that experiences have to be happenings of a processive kind. In short, I grant that O'Shaughnessy may illustrate a significant difference by means of the discussed thought experiment, but I do not think it forces a processive view of experience on us.

To sum up. In this section, I turned to O'Shaughnessy's view of perceptual experience, for it constitutes one of the most systematic and radical defences of the processive stance. After unpacking it, I went on to examine the motivations behind that position. In principle, pure conceptual analysis and reflection on the case of total mental freeze are intended to convince us that perceptual experiences can only be mental processes, not mental states. But, as far as I can see, such considerations are far from unproblematic. At one point throughout his discussion, O'Shaughnessy himself claims that that the notion of experience is not a provider of ontological or categorial status to whatever falling under that concept (cf.

O'Shaughnessy 2000, 41-2). He should, it seems to me, have made more of this tenet.

### III. SOTERIOU ON THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF TEMPORALLY EXTENDED EXPERIENCE

Soteriou endorses what is to an important extent a processive account of experience, but he also takes some distance from O'Shaughnessy's radical stance. In very broad lines, he holds that perceptual experiences are mental states constituted by phenomenally conscious processes. This version of the processive view is driven at least by two motivations: on the one hand, a number of phenomenological facts about temporally extended experiences, and, on the other, a problematic understanding of mental states. After unpacking Soteriou's position, I shall argue that the bearing of temporal phenomenology on ontological matters is much weaker than what Soteriou suggests. Since a discussion of the way he understands perceptual states will clarify the key notion behind the stative view, I postpone it until the next chapter (cf. chapter 2.3).<sup>13</sup>

As just noted, processes as well as states play a crucial role in Soteriou's view of perceptual experience. He writes as follows:

My suggestion is that we need to appeal to the obtaining of 'occurrent' perceptual states in an account of the ontology of experience—perceptual states whose obtaining *constitutively* depends on the occurrence of processive phenomenally conscious experiential happenings. These occurrent perceptual states obtain over intervals of time. They do not unfold over time. But they are not homogeneous down to instants. Their obtaining over an interval of time depends on the occurrence of something that *takes* an interval of time—i.e., the unfolding of phenomenally conscious experiential happenings. (Soteriou 2011, 497)

Like Vendler and O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou acknowledges a basic distinction between processes and states: whereas the former unfold or go on, the latter obtain. Processive and stative items persist, but they do so in different ways.

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<sup>13</sup> Although Soteriou's most recent and comprehensive account of this position figures in Soteriou 2013, I shall mostly focus on Soteriou 2011. Soteriou's most recent work is an elaborate and complex discussion where the relevant stative-cum-processive view is defended in a piecemeal way throughout several chapters. To tackle that work, it would be necessary to address each one of the themes covered by Soteriou, a task I confess myself unable to tackle here. For this reason, my critical assessment focuses on the much more manageable paper from 2011.



Again, he recognizes that both ontological categories ground different understandings of perceptual experiences. Soteriou nevertheless parts company with his predecessors by taking perceptual states to be constituted by perceptual processes. This position primarily conceives perceptual experiences along stative lines, but also incorporates a processive framework: the relevant perceptual states are constituted by or made of perceptual processes – that is, unfolding 'phenomenally conscious experiential happenings'. Thus, Soteriou outlines an intimate connection – namely, a constitutive one – between perceptual processes and perceptual states: according to him, the role which perceptual experiences are supposed to play is only reflected by a combination of the two ontological categories at stake. What that role is, is an issue I touch on in a moment.

To develop the previous account of perceptual experience, Soteriou naturally has to modify the ontological framework he borrows from Vendler and O'Shaughnessy: whereas these two philosophers only acknowledged a fundamental distinction between processes and states, Soteriou additionally invokes the notion of states constituted by processes – or, to use a terminology I already introduced in the last section, the notion of process-dependent state. The thought is that nothing in the concept of a state rules out that there might be states the existence of which depended on the existence of processes unfolding in the subjects of the relevant states: that is, one may conceive instances of certain mental states which only obtain when the object or subject instantiating such states also go through certain processes. As Soteriou claims, it is conceivable that 'a series of events involving an object can amount to that object being modified in some way or other, where the object is in its modified state while, and because, those events occur, hence the idea that some state of the object (the way in which it is modified) obtains in virtue of, and for the duration of the occurrence of those events.' (Soteriou 2011, 496) Since the relevant events or happenings may naturally be processive, the original thought translates into the claim that there may states which obtain in virtue of, and for the duration of the occurrence of certain processes. In support of this claim, a number of familiar physical and mental examples may be invoked. The temperature of a liquid is a physical state which depends on molecular processes: a given amount of water will remain at a certain temperature in virtue of, and for as

long as those processes continue (cf. Steward 1997; Soteriou 2011). Likewise, a subject often stands in somato-sensory states (a burning pain, say) which in turn depend on several neuro-biological processes (cf. Soteriou 2007). Although Soteriou's notion of process-constituted states or that of process-dependent state may not be wholly uncontroversial, the previous examples do a good job at illustrating the general thought, namely, that there are certain kinds of mental states which obtain in a subject S only if processes of a certain kind unfold in S.

Having said that, it is worth pausing to consider the relationship between the present view of perceptual experiences and those I unpacked in the last two sections. Take Vendler's view first. Although Soteriou's position certainly echoes the stative view of temporally extended seeing, it also invokes perceptual processes as constitutive elements of perceptual states. I previously argued that Vendler hints at two ways of understanding the relationship between a processive and a stative view: most explicitly but rather unsuccessfully, he took both of them to be incompatible; alternatively, he suggested a more ecumenical path according to which perceptual processes are ontologically robust entities which may, but need not to, piggyback on more ontologically austere perceptual states. Either way, Vendler's and Soteriou's views do not coincide: Soteriou certainly combines the two relevant ontological categories within his own account, but he does so by claiming that perceptual processes are constitutive elements (necessary ingredients, as it were) of perceptual states, not entities over and above a stative ontology. The view of perceptual experience at hand is, I think, more germane to O'Shaughnessy's stance: Soteriou highlights the importance of unfolding, phenomenally conscious experiential happenings for our understanding of perceptual phenomena; again, his claim to the effect that perceptual states are constituted by perceptual processes is in principle compatible with the idea of irreducible perceptual processes. O'Shaughnessy's and Soteriou's views are not identical, but they may complement each other. Finally, the present conception of perceptual processes also suggests that a processive view is committed to entities over and above those required by a stative ontology of perceptual experiences. As previously mentioned, the relevant processes are not physical, but phenomenally conscious. Furthermore, such perceptual processes are supposed to be constitutive

elements of perceptual states. This dependency relation suggests that experiential processes could not be reduced into experiential states, for the latter precisely depend on a processive analysis. Like Vendler and O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou takes the relevant processes to be items over and above a stative ontology of perceptual awareness.

Moving into the second stage of this section, a key motivation behind this stative-cum-processive account is that it allegedly accommodates certain phenomenological facts about temporally extended experiences. Two general thoughts underpin that claim: (i) that the previous facts are non-negotiable features of perceptual experiences, or at least of the way we think about them; and (ii), that ontological views of perceptual awareness have a bearing on such facts. Without (i), it would be unclear why the relevant facts should be accommodated at all. Without (ii), it would be unclear why an ontological exploration of perceptual experiences should take those facts into account, even if they are non-negotiable features of what it means to be perceptually aware of the world. To press Soteriou's line of reasoning, one could naturally challenge either assumption. Although I say something about (i) towards the end of this section, I mostly focus on (ii).

The key phenomenological facts are: first, the temporal properties of perceptual experiences are transparent; secondly, certain objects of perception appear to be temporally continuous; and, thirdly, when a subject is perceptually aware of such objects, her perceptual experiences apparently share the same temporal continuity. I elaborate on each aspect next.

The general thought behind the idea of transparency is that reflection on perceptual experiences is not sensitive to features of the experiences themselves, but only to features of the worldly items or states of affairs our perceptual experiences are of. For example, if I reflect on my current visual experiences, I cannot attend to the very mental phenomena opening the visible world to me, but only to the items I see, e.g. a laptop, a table, a few DVDs, etc. - in this sense, experiences themselves are 'invisible' or 'transparent' to reflection. Again, when Jim introspects his visual experiences during  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$ , he can only attend to a star, clouds, among other worldly features: the experiences in virtue of which the

relevant scene is presented to him, however, remains elusive to his attentional capacities. As illustrated here, the idea of transparency involves two specific claims: first, that reflection on perceptual experiences refers to the worldly items such experiences are of or about; and, secondly, that it refers to nothing more than those items (cf. Crane 2005/2011). Thus understood, the idea of experiential transparency is controversial in virtue of the second or negative claim.<sup>14</sup> Soteriou, however, identifies a 'weaker version' of the claim: 'when one attempts to attend introspectively to what it is like for one to be having a perceptual experience it seems to one as though one can only do so through attending to the sorts of objects, qualities and relations one is apparently perceptually aware of in having the experience.' (Soteriou 2011, 488) This formulation is weaker precisely because it constrains the negative claim behind the idea of transparency: instead of holding that experiential features are wholly inaccessible to our attentional capacities, it subordinates the introspective awareness of mental items to the possibility of attending to the relevant experienced items. This subtle qualification is crucial, for, as I shall explain in a moment, it carries over into Soteriou's formulation of the temporal transparency of perceptual experiences.

Given the previous considerations, Soteriou goes on to unpack the idea of temporal transparency as follows:

[...] the temporal location of one's perceptual experience seems to one to be transparent to the temporal location of whatever it is that one is aware of in having that experience. When one introspects one's experience, the temporal location of one's perceptual experience seems to one to be transparent to the temporal location of whatever it is that one is aware of in having that experience. Introspectively, it doesn't seem to one as though one can mark out the temporal location of one's perceptual experience as distinct from the temporal location of whatever it is that one seems to be perceptually aware of. (Soteriou 2011, 589)

This formulation does not deviate from a traditional understanding of experiential transparency: when we introspect or reflect on our own perceptual experiences, the latter's temporal properties are not obviously manifest to us; when we exercise our introspective capacities, the only temporal features which are immediately salient to us belong to the worldly items or states of affairs we are

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<sup>14</sup> I discuss the temporal transparency of perceptual experiences a bit further in chapter 3.1.

thus acquainted with. For example, when we decide to introspect our current visual experiences of a person running across the park, it is natural to think that the temporal features we can attend to in virtue of attending to these experiences correspond to the perceived runner or her current activity. This does not mean that we or our experiences would be immune to temporal modifications: but, although we and our perceptual occurrences are no doubt subject to physical time, it does not follow that we can access any of such modifications via pure introspection.

So far, so good. Immediately after the above quote, however, Soteriou relates the temporal transparency of perceptual experiences to a somewhat different thought:

Furthermore, it seems to one as though the temporal location of one's experience depends on, and is determined by, the temporal location of whatever it is that one's experience is an experience of. So, for example, when one perceives an unfolding occurrence (e.g., the movement of an object across space), it seems to one as though one's perceptual experience has the temporal location and duration of its object, and it seems to one as though the temporal location and duration of each temporal part of one's experience is transparent to the temporal location and duration of each temporal part of the unfolding occurrence one seems to perceive. (Soteriou 2011, 589)

This remark constitutes a substantive addition to the previous line of reasoning: for, while the initial thought about transparency presses the inaccessibility of perceptual experiences via introspection, Soteriou now draws a link between the temporal properties of perceived objects and those of the corresponding perceptual experiences; in particular, he claims that the 'temporal location' of the items we perceive governs the 'temporal location' of our perceptual experiences. This claim, I think, qualifies the negative component behind the idea of transparency, for it suggests that reflection on what we are perceptually aware of reveals something about the temporal character of our perceptual experiences. Although Soteriou does not make the point explicit, I think this deviation should be read in the light of his 'weaker version' of experiential transparency: if the background thought is not that perceptual experiences are inaccessible through first-person introspection, but only that the possibility of so accessing them depends on attending to the worldly items we experience; it would be reasonable to hold that the temporal structure of perceptual experiences is introspectively

revealed by attending to the temporal structure of what is thus experienced.

The second phenomenological aspect Soteriou picks up on concerns 'the apparent temporal extent of the objects of perceptual experience.' (Soteriou 2011, 489) To illustrate this point, he turns to the perception of temporally extended events: related to the fact that such happenings have temporal parts intimately related to each other, subjects may only experience them by being aware of their parts. True: it is possible to perceive durationless events or parts of temporally extended ones. But what Soteriou intends to reject here is the possibility of perceiving temporally extended events without perceiving temporally extended parts of them. As he also puts it, '[i]f one tries just to attend to an instantaneous temporal part of the occurrence, without attending to a temporal part of the occurrence that has temporal extension, then one will fail.' (Soteriou 2011, 489) The third phenomenological aspect is closely related, for it also concerns the idea of temporal extension: whereas the second fact highlights the continuity or temporal extension of perceived items, Soteriou next invokes 'the apparent continuity of conscious experience over time.' (Soteriou 2011, 490) Just as certain objects of perception seem to have temporal parts intimately related to each other, subjects undergo perceptual experiences constituted by closely connected temporal parts: 'when one undergoes a conscious perceptual experience that fills an interval of time, each sub-interval of that interval of time is filled by some successive phase of that experience, and each successive phase of the experience shares a temporal part with some prior phase of experience.' (Soteriou 2011, 490) For example, when a subject stares at the second-hand of a clock during a period of time, she also observes a temporally extended event or at least part of one. But, in addition to that, the continuity of the perceived event also seems to transpire into the temporal structure of the very experience she goes through: when she observes the second-hand, her visual experiences do not seem to bundle together as a set of temporally discrete items, but to coalesce into one continuous experiential stream. The remaining two phenomenological facts are thus closely related: while one highlights the temporal continuity of perceived items, the other stresses that of perceptual experiences themselves.

This phenomenological picture underpins the processive-cum-stative view

of perceptual experiences. As I previously noted, Soteriou thinks that an ontology of perception should be capable of accommodating the previous facts. That being the case, he goes on to develop the following difficulty: whereas only a processive view could capture the transparency and the continuity of temporally extended experiences, a stative stance is best equipped to incorporate the apparent continuity of perceived objects. In short, the problem is that neither ontology of perception accommodates on its own the previous phenomenological picture: while a processive view does not recognize the continuity of perceived objects, a stative view fails reflecting the temporal transparency and continuity of experiences. To address this difficulty, Soteriou develops an ontological view which relies on perceptual states as well as perceptual processes: in particular, he pursues a conception of perceptual experiences as occurrent states, that is, as perceptual states constituted by phenomenally conscious processes. In virtue of its dual nature, this account apparently has the necessary resources to embrace all the aforementioned phenomenological facts.

There are no doubt commonalities between the position I defend in this dissertation and Soteriou's stance: for example, I also defend a stative conception, and, in doing so, invoke a notion of process-dependent state germane to that of occurrent state. That said, these two views are incompatible at least for the following reasons: first, the processes I rely on are not phenomenally conscious, but merely physical; and, secondly, the specific way in which I think of perceptual states is not the same as Soteriou's. Since the latter issue depends on clarifying how mental states could be conceived, it will be discussed in the next section. For the time being, I shall focus on the first point. More specifically, I move on to show that the notion of phenomenally conscious process is problematic for two reasons: on the one hand, its bearing on the phenomenology of perceptual experiences is far from obvious; and, on the other, the phenomenological facts by means of which Soteriou motivates the notion are themselves controversial.

The first issue concerns the fact that, according to Soteriou, a processive ontology accommodates the transparency and the apparent continuity of temporally extended perceptual experiences. A processive view, he thinks, could incorporate the first phenomenological fact because, on such a view, 'one might

maintain that each momentary temporal part of an experiential occurrence that unfolds over some interval of time presents some aspect of the environment as concurrent with it.' (Soteriou 2011, 492) According to the processive view, perceptual experiences are temporally extended happenings of a processive kind: more specifically, such events are temporally structured insofar as they have a beginning, a middle, and an end; and such parts in turn consist in the different parts of the processes which constitute the relevant events. Soteriou's point seems to be that, if perceptual experiences are conceived along processive lines, one could save the idea of transparency by taking each sub-interval of a perceptual process to be transparent: in particular, one could argue that each part of such a process presents a subject with different aspects of a temporally unfolding world, and hence, make such worldly items accessible to introspection. The thought seems initially sound, but it does not prove much: it does not, for example, unveil a necessary link between temporal transparency and perceptual processes; or, again, it fails to clarify how such processes implement that phenomenological feature. As far as I can see, it only shows that they are mutually compatible. To vindicate the processive view, Soteriou must assume that a stative account fails to accommodate the idea of temporal transparency on its own. The next chapter, however, precisely challenges that assumption: relying on perceptual states does not, I think, interfere with the relevant phenomenological trait (cf. chapter 2.3).

But Soteriou also resorts to another phenomenological fact, namely, the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences. Thus, he writes as follows:

This view accommodates the idea that when one undergoes a conscious experience that fills an interval of time, each sub-interval of that interval of time is filled by some successive phase of that experience, and each successive phase of the experience shares a temporal part with some prior phase of experience—e.g., it can accommodate the idea that experience one undergoes from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$  can share a temporal part with experience one undergoes from  $t_5$  to  $t_{15}$ , and it can do so without needing to commit to the idea that there is some one perceptual state of the subject that continues to obtain from  $t_1$  to  $t_{15}$ . (Soteriou 2011, 491)

The background thought is that ascribing different temporal structures to processes and states partly amounts to conceiving of the internal relationship of their sub-parts in different ways. Process-parts are intimately connected insofar as



they jointly constitute a whole – that is, a determinate process or event – and necessitate each other: Soteriou and O'Shaughnessy think that each successive phase of a process shares a temporal part with a prior phase of the same process. Meanwhile, states exist wholly at each moment of time they obtain: hence, there is a sense in which their parts are not internally related to each other; each state-part is complete on its own. In the quote at hand, Soteriou simply applies the previous distinction to a processive view of perceptual experiences: conceived as processes, these psychological items would be such that their temporal sub-parts are intimately intertwined; successive experience-parts are mutually connected – that is, each successive phase of an experience shares a temporal part with some prior phase of the same experience – so as to constitute an organic whole.

Having said that, it is unclear to me how the previous remarks help to motivate a processive view. As far as I can see, Soteriou has only established that, conceived as processes, the constituting temporal parts of perceptual experiences are intimately related to each other. But this ontological point has no phenomenological implications: in particular, it does not automatically show that perceptual experiences seem to be temporally continuous to their respective subjects. For example, one could imagine a world where temporally continuous perceptual experiences are presented to their owners as successive snapshots, that is, as temporally discrete items. To rule out this possibility, it is necessary to invoke a controversial principle along the lines of Hume's 'all the actions and sensations of the mind [...] must in every detail appear to be what they are, and be what they appear.' (Hume 1739-40/2000, 1.4.2.7, SBN 190) However, Soteriou has not secured a principle along those lines: and, as long as this issue remains pending, he cannot assume that the previous ontological remark accommodates part of his phenomenological picture.

Let's take stock. Soteriou's reliance on perceptual processes is to an important extent fuelled by a phenomenological motivation: unlike a stative view, a processive ontology manages to accommodate the temporal transparency and apparent continuity of perceptual experiences. This section, however, aimed to put some pressure on that claim. In relation to the first aspect, Soteriou outlines how a story combining a processive view and temporal transparency could run, but does

not show how or why perceptual processes exactly implement such a phenomenological feature. More importantly, the negative thought that a stative ontology fails to capture the same aspect relies on an understanding of perceptual states which I challenge in the next chapter: if my line of attack turns out to be persuasive, the idea of temporal transparency should not force us to endorse a processive stance. In relation to the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences, Soteriou only secures the ontological point that the successive parts of perceptual processes are intimately related to each other: unless he prove that such processes have to appear to their owners the way they are – something which is by no means obvious – it is unclear how his ontological considerations show that a processive view accommodates the relevant feature. In short, I do not think that Soteriou's phenomenological case for perceptual processes has enough traction.

In addition to the previous issue, one could also put some pressure on the very phenomenological picture which Soteriou uses to motivate the processive stance: in particular, there might well be a tension between the temporal transparency and the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences. Since such experiential items are transparent, reflection or introspection on them primarily latches onto the worldly items a subject is aware of rather than the experiences themselves. In an intuitive sense, perceptual experiences are not manifest to our introspective capacities. But Soteriou then goes on stressing an important feature about the nature of perceptual awareness, namely, that the successive sub-parts or sub-intervals within a temporally extended experience seem to be intimately intertwined. And, at this point, I suspect one may envisage the relevant tension: while the idea of transparency suggests that perceptual experiences are not introspectively manifest to their subjects, the fact concerning the apparent continuity of perceptual awareness presupposes that an experiential feature becomes manifest to us whenever we attend to our own experiences. This contrast naturally raises the question whether both phenomenological facts are mutually compatible. I suspect that Soteriou implicitly acknowledges a problem here, for he endorses only a weaker version of the transparency claim: instead of saying that experiences or their properties are inaccessible via introspection, he only holds that such an introspective access is dependent on our awareness of worldly items. On

the basis of considerations along the lines of Dennett's remarks on transparency (cf. section 2 of this chapter and chapter 3.1), I think that a stronger version of the thought that the temporal properties of perceptual experiences are transparent is intuitively appealing. For the time being, my main point is just that the phenomenological picture from which Soteriou takes off is far from uncontroversial: that is, one could challenge not only his phenomenological case in favour of perceptual processes, but also the very picture he uses in order to invoke such items.

To sum up. Soteriou presents us with an account where perceptual experiences are conceived in terms of mental processes and states: while he expands on O'Shaughnessy's processive account, he also makes room for a stative understanding of perceptual awareness. After introducing this position, I went on to discuss its underpinning phenomenological motivation. In this context, the overall aim of this section was to show that Soteriou's view does not force the relevant notion of perceptual process on us. Although my discussion is not a complete refutation of that position, it hopefully encourages us to take seriously the stative account I shall defend. Throughout the next chapter, I shall return to elements and issues unpacked in this section.

#### IV. CROWTHER ON PERCEPTION AND PERCEPTUAL ACTIVITIES

In a number of recent papers (cf. Crowther 2009a, 2009b, 2010), Thomas Crowther explores the relationship between perception and closely related attentional activities: in this context, he endorses a processive view of attentional activities such as listening and watching, on the one hand, and, on the other, an ontology of perceptual awareness very similar to that developed by Soteriou. This section will be brief: after all, since he is mainly concerned with the attentional component of perceptual phenomena, Crowther does not really argue for the underpinning ontology of experiences. As such, the present survey only aims to complement the processive picture I have already outlined throughout this chapter.

As previously pointed out, Crowther acknowledges a distinction between

perception (e.g. hearing, seeing) and perceptual forms of attention (e.g. listening, watching): whereas hearing and seeing are passive mental phenomena, in the sense that they are things which merely happen to their respective subjects; listening and watching, among other attentive activities, are agential insofar as they are things subjects do. This divide naturally raises the question how the passive and agential components involved in perceptual phenomena are related to each other. In a discussion focused on the auditory modality, it is relatively clear that Crowther rejects a causal (or, to use his terminology, instrumental) view of the relevant relationship: for example, cases of hearing should not be conceived as causally resulting from episodes of listening. If I understand his positive stance right, he draws a constitutive link between both components: although a subject may hear something without listening to it, listening is intimately connected to hearing because it precisely consists in maintaining an aural relation with the world in order to acquire knowledge about it. As Crowther puts it, 'listening entails hearing because to listen to O is to agentially maintain aural perceptual contact with (i.e. hearing of) O throughout a period of time with the aim of knowing what it is doing.' (Crowther 2009b, 186) Indeed, listening is something a subject does, not something which merely happens to her: in particular, it is to preserve auditory links with the world so as to obtain updated information of one's own audible surroundings. According to this picture, listening entails hearing not because there is a causal link or a productive relationship between both, but because listening constitutively depends on hearing: by hearing her surroundings, a subject manages to stay in perceptual contact with surrounding items, and, hence, to generate knowledge about them. As far as I can see, a story about the relationship between seeing and watching may be developed along similar lines.

Why Crowther takes certain forms of perceptual attention to be processes and how such a processive view is related to the agential aspect of listening and watching, are delicate issues I do not tackle here: for present purposes, this section is only concerned with the underpinning view of perceptual phenomena. In relation to hearing, Crowther writes:

[...] hearing O is not agential. Here, we can agree with both Vendler (1957) and O'Shaughnessy (2000) as we distinguish between different senses of 'hearing O'. On the one hand, we might take 'hearing O' to be the name of a state or condition of a subject, a way that the subject can be. [...] On the other hand, 'hearing O' might be understood as a perceptual occurrence. In this sense, we take hearing to be a processive constituent of the stream of consciousness. To distinguish it from the stative notion we might refer to such a process as 'aurally apprehending O' or the 'aural apprehension of O'. Aurally apprehending the fireworks exploding is not a state but a processive occurrence that unfolds over time. (Crowther 2009b, 185)

Building on the conceptual framework provided by Vendler, Crowther thus suggests that perceptual experiences – that is, phenomena of perceptual awareness over time – may be understood in terms of mental states as well as mental processes. Although he does not elaborate on this view any further, a related footnote (cf. Crowther 2009b, 186n.28) makes at least two things relatively clear. First, that this stative-cum-processive view of perceptual experience relies on the notion of process-dependent state. In this respect, Crowther's stance is practically identical to Soteriou's. And, secondly, that the relevant notions of perceptual process, event, or occurrence, are motivated by O'Shaughnessy's case of total mental freeze. Since I have addressed this thought experiment in section 2, I shall not pause to consider it again.

Crowther thus combines a processive view of perceptual activities with an experiential ontology structurally similar to that developed by Soteriou. To defend the previous account of perceptual awareness, he does not advance any additional considerations vis-à-vis those I have already examined throughout the preceding sections. In the present context, Crowther is of course not hard pressed to provide such credentials, for, unlike O'Shaughnessy and Soteriou, he is mainly interested in vindicating a theory of perceptual attention. But, as far as I can see, there is no necessary connection between this theory and the aforementioned ontology of perceptual experiences: accordingly, this dissertation will remain silent on the question how forms of perceptual attention should be ontologically categorized. In principle, attention could be processive even if perceiving is not. For the time being, what I particularly want to stress is how much Crowther's working-hypothesis about perceptual experiences owes to the views defended by O'Shaughnessy and Soteriou. It should be clear by now why this position belongs to the family of views I aim to take distance from: it relies on a category of items I

ultimately deem unnecessary and problematic, namely, phenomenally conscious processes. Whereas the previous sections aimed to challenge the motivations behind the belief in such perceptual processes, the next chapter will show how perceptual experiences may be accommodated within a stative framework.

## V. CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND THE WAY AHEAD

To conclude, I shall sum up what came before and what will come after this section.

This chapter aimed to introduce the question what kind of items perceptual experiences are, on the one hand, and, on the other, to survey a number of prominent answers I shall resist. In section 1, I examined Zeno Vendler's influential work on the analysis of seeing, so as to illustrate the main views I shall be concerned with. Faced with the question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences, at least two ontological alternatives emerge: according to a processive view, those psychological items should be conceived as mental processes; according to a stative view, perceptual awareness ultimately consists in mental states. Of course, this picture is far from exhaustive: although Vendler is keen to endorse a stative view of seeing, I only take his discussion to provide a general framework I intend to flesh as we go along. Section 2 begins descending into the finer details by presenting one of three contemporary versions of the processive stance: according to O'Shaughnessy, perceptual experiences should be conceived as occurrent to the core. In section 3, I explain that Soteriou's work draws almost in equal measures from Vendler and O'Shaughnessy: the resulting view is a stative-cum-processive stance of experience according to which perceptual awareness consists in mental states obtaining in subjects, states which nevertheless depend on the occurrence of phenomenally conscious, experiential processes. As briefly explained in section 4, Crowther's position is structurally similar to that endorsed by Soteriou. The line of thought this survey has thus intended to illustrate is that perceptual experiences have to be understood in terms of irreducible mental processes. Throughout this chapter, I have been keen to stress

that these perceptual processes constitute a substantive addition to our general ontology: conceived along such lines, perceptual experiences are not subsumed by an ontological framework which embraces objects, properties, relations, states, dispositions, capacities, or physical processes analysable into state-parts; according to the processive theorist, perceptual experiences are happenings of a particular processive kind – namely, a phenomenally conscious kind – and, as such, cannot be explained away in terms of the preceding categories. This view may not be mutually exclusive with a stative stance, but its ontological weight raises the question whether it is necessary to invoke mental processes in order to save perceptual experiences. My critical assessment of the motivations behind O'Shaughnessy's and Soteriou's positions partially suggests a negative answer: that is, I think that conceptual analysis, the thought experiment of total mental freeze, and a number of facts about temporal phenomenology do not force a processive view on us. If, in addition to that, a stative account turns out to be capable of accommodating the notion of perceptual experiences, the aforementioned processes would be somewhat pointless.

Having said that, let me sketch the itinerary I shall follow throughout this dissertation. Chapters 1 and 2 aim to show that an ontology of perceptual processes is unnecessary: while this chapter has done so by fixing on different versions of the processive view and targeting their motivations; the next one turns to a more detailed formulation and defence of the stative view. Chapters 3 and 4, meanwhile, pursue a stronger claim, namely, that perceptual processes are not only unnecessary, but problematic. I proceed in a piecemeal way: on the one hand, I seek to show that the individuation of temporally extended perceptual experiences is best accommodated by a stative conception rather than a processive one; on the other, I argue that perceptual states are better suited than perceptual processes to deal with an essential feature of perceptual experiences, namely, their assertive character. This piecemeal defence may be partial, but it is by no means arbitrary. Conceived as mental states, perceptual experiences would share an important ontological commonality with the paradigmatically stative category of belief: the next chapter highlights this similarity by using a belief-theory of perception as a template against which I specify a stative view. Within this context, chapters 3 and

4 are natural steps in a comparison of perceptual experiences and beliefs. I do believe that discussions about the individuation of temporally extended experiences have much to learn from the general way in which doxastic states are individuated. Again, the feature of assertive character is a commonality between the relevant psychological categories: just as beliefs present a subject with propositional contents which seem to be true, perceptual experiences present a subject with things which seem to be the case – in short, both beliefs and perceptual experiences have assertive force. The same psychological comparison underpins the final chapter of this dissertation: in chapter 5, I discuss different takes on the distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs; then, I explain how a stative view may accommodate a criterion of experience-belief distinction based on a nonconceptualist view of perceptual states. If successful, this line of reasoning shows that a stative view of perceptual experience may still honour the intuitive divide between perceiving and believing. As such, it also makes a significant contribution to the general claim chapters 1 and 2 aim to support, namely, that it is not necessary to invoke perceptual processes in order to understand perceptual awareness.



## CHAPTER 2

### A STATIVE VIEW OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

This dissertation is concerned with the question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences. In the last chapter, I introduced two ontological options, namely, a stative and a processive view of perceptual experience. On the assumption that there is a significant distinction between states and processes, both positions may be briefly expressed as follows:

- (S) Perceptual experiences are mental states.
- (P) Perceptual experiences are mental processes.

A key motivation behind chapters 1 and 2 is that, relative to a stative ontology of perceptual experiences, perceptual processes involve a substantive and unnecessary ontological commitment. While the previous chapter sought to support that claim by unpacking and critically assessing (P), I shall now strive to show that perceptual states are more ontologically austere than perceptual processes. To pursue this task, Vendler's work might seem a natural starting-point: after all, a stative ontology lies at its core. That discussion is, however, of limited use here at least for two reasons. First, it builds on a conflation between processes simpliciter and agential processes: although Vendler shows that perceptual experiences are not actions of a processive kind, he has not yet undermined the thought that they could be passive, that is, processes which merely happen to a subject (cf. chapter 1.1). Secondly, the ontological framework on which it rests is too schematic to illuminate (S). Vendler's account should thus be seen as a blueprint in need of further clarification. Among the different sources from which I shall draw, a prominent one is the work of David Armstrong and George Pitcher: traditionally known for defending a belief-theory of perception, they argue that perceptual phenomena should be analysed in terms of belief-states. Although this dissertation goes nowhere close to suggest that perceiving is believing, or that perceptual experiences are simply a special kind of beliefs, a stative view does set both psychological categories on the same side of the state-process fence. Since a belief-theory is indeed stative, its general structure may be used in order to model perceptual experiences as non-doxastic states.

The present task is divided into five parts. Section 1 turns to Armstrong's and Pitcher's work, from which I extract the template for a stative account. In this context, I highlight two facts: first, that the constitutive characterization of perceptual experiences crucially relies on a functionalist analysis – a point I make much of in chapters 4 and 5 (cf. chapters 4.2-3 & 5.4); and, secondly, that perceptual experiences may still be conceived as events when construed as process-dependent states. Section 2 shows how perceptual states involve a more austere ontological commitment than perceptual processes: for this purpose, I invoke Michael Thau's distinction between internal and instantial states, and then

claim that perceptual states should be conceived as instantial. In section 3, I tackle the apparent similarity between my stative position and Soteriou's: after all, he also vindicates a stative analysis of perceptual experience, and, more importantly, uses a notion of occurrent state structurally similar to the notion of process-dependent state I have put to work in chapter 1. To address this point, I highlight the fact that my process-depending states dispense with processes of a phenomenally conscious kind. Then, I show that my stative position could accommodate a great deal of the phenomenological picture which Soteriou seeks to vindicate. Section 4 addresses an objection traditionally associated to belief-theories of perception: on the assumption that perceptual states can only be doxastic propositional attitudes, one could argue that a stative view over-intellectualizes perceptual experiences. The general thought is that my stative position ultimately collapses into a traditional belief-theory of perception. To meet this charge, I show that neither Armstrong nor Pitcher over-intellectualize perceptual phenomena. As far as I can see, the main role of the doxastic notions they use is to provide an informational story of perception. Finally, section 5 examines whether a stative view obscures a venerable distinction between perceptual experiences as episodes manifest to consciousness, on the one hand, and, on the other, beliefs as states which may be but need not be so. I argue that (S) can perfectly accommodate that divide.

#### I. ARMSTRONG AND PITCHER ON PERCEPTUAL STATES

Discussing Vendler's work (see chapter 1.1), I outlined the basic import of a stative view: according to this position, perceptual experiences exist in time, and do so not by unfolding or going on, but by obtaining. Among other things, this means that those psychological items lack the sort of temporal parts or temporal structure that events of a processive kind have: as states, they are wholly present or complete at each moment throughout which they obtain. When Jim sees a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , he is visually aware of that object during  $t_1$ - $t_x$ , where this relation of perceptual awareness should be understood as the obtaining of a certain kind of state in Jim during that period of time. In this section, I shall flesh out this basic picture a bit further, and, to do so, I heavily draw from the work of Armstrong and Pitcher (cf.

Armstrong 1968 and Pitcher 1971). This choice is by no means arbitrary. Since beliefs are paradigmatic forms of mental states, (S)'s core claim amounts to arguing that, from an ontological point of view, perceptual experiences are similar to beliefs. In this context, Armstrong's and Pitcher's proposals are relevant, for they are traditionally taken to assimilate perceiving and perceptual experiences to believing and beliefs, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Hence, I think that their positions provide a good blueprint for developing (S). Among other things, this method of presentation will help me to highlight, first, that perceptual states are functionally specified, and, secondly, that a stative view does not undermine an intuitive understanding of perceptual experiences as events.

In broad lines, a belief-theory of perception holds that perceptual experiences are states acquired by means of certain informational channels (in particular, certain sensory organs): thanks to these states, subjects are capable of behaving in different ways vis-à-vis their surroundings. According to Armstrong,

[...] to say that A perceives that *p* is to say that A comes to be in a certain state, a state which can only be described in terms of its possible manifestations. Now if we want to give an analysis of the concept of perception which is compatible with (without entailing) a Materialist view of man, we shall have to say that these manifestations are simply certain sorts of purely physical behaviour. (Armstrong 1968, 245-6)

The ontological significance of this passage may not be fully appreciated: after all, as Alex Byrne correctly notes, philosophers of mind often use 'mental state' as an umbrella term for conditions, events, phenomena, among other items (cf. Byrne 2009, 432). But, in the present context, Armstrong does rely on an ontological framework similar to Vendler's (cf. Armstrong 1968, 130-1, 213-4): as such, the previous quote indicates a serious commitment to a stative position. Pitcher also seems to acknowledge the ontological significance of a stative view, for he introduces the notion of perceptual states as belief-states, where 'to have a belief of this kind is to have a complex disposition to act (or behave) in certain ways under certain specifiable conditions.' (Pitcher 1971, 71)<sup>16</sup> To specify the

<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that the belief-theory of perception is not as unpopular as one may initially think. Writers who develop this position include Roxbee Cox 1971, Sibley 1971, Craig 1976, Heil 1984, Glüer 2009, among others.

<sup>16</sup> Using the notion of disposition in this context is a rather delicate matter, for it may suggest a behaviourist account of perceptual experiences. To avoid this difficulty, Armstrong specifies

notion of perceptual state, Armstrong and Pitcher resort, on the one hand, to the way in which subjects are perceptually affected, and, on the other, to the way in which they are responsive to their surroundings. Since these features seem to pick up on constitutive components of the relevant states, it is necessary to say a bit more about them.

To begin with, perceptual states cannot result from any random informational transaction between a subject and her surroundings: on the contrary, the specific kind of states they are seems to be determined by the informational channels they result from. According to Armstrong and Pitcher, a perceiver stands in a certain visual state only when her eyes are informationally affected (cf. Armstrong 1968, 211-3; Pitcher 1971, 65). The suggestion is, I think, that perceptual states are partly defined by the sensory organs, in particular, or the sensory systems, more generally, they are causally related to. Admittedly, what form this organic constraint takes will vary from species to species. Again, I am even willing to concede that, across different possible worlds, one and the same species could implement the same perceptual states through different sensory systems. It would be natural to expect all of this from psychological phenomena contingently shaped by evolution. These possibilities are, however, compatible with the fact that, in the world we happen to inhabit, our perceptual states are constitutively dependent on their corresponding informational channels: from a functional point of view, the latter channels define the input side of the relevant mental states.

On their output side, perceptual states are constitutively related to their behavioural manifestations. In the present context, the notion of behaviour should be understood in a very liberal way.<sup>17</sup> For Armstrong, discriminatory behaviour – a form of covert behaviour – is a paradigmatic way in which perceptual states manifest themselves. When a baby faces blocks of different colours, visual

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that, by dispositions, he understands actual states of a subject (cf. Armstrong 1965, 69-75; 1968, 85-8). It is much less clear, however, whether Pitcher seeks to avoid a behaviourist stance.

<sup>17</sup> I suspect that, at least implicitly, this understanding is familiar in the philosophical literature. B.A. Farrell noted long ago that, discussing the distinctive character of conscious experience, philosophers and scientists tend to 'stretch the word "behaviour" to cover, at least, the covert verbal and other responses of the person, his response readiesses, all his relevant bodily states, and all the possible discriminations he can make to' presented worldly items (cf. Farrell 1950, 177).

experiences are often ascribed to it on the basis of its capacity systematically to discriminate different shapes or different colours with the help of its eyes (cf. Armstrong 1968, 245ff.).<sup>18</sup> From this case, Armstrong generalizes as follows:

If, under certain conditions, a blue block acts on the baby's eyes, and if the baby follows this with one or many patterns of behaviour, *b*, which involve certain definite relations, *r*, to the blue block: and if, under the same conditions, when a green block acts on the baby's eyes, it does not follow this with behaviour of the sort, *b*, then this is a manifestation of perception of the difference between the blue and green blocks. That is to say, if the baby behaves towards the blue and green blocks in a systematically different way, then it has shown that it can perceive their difference. (Armstrong 1968, 248)

Since the open variables may be replaced by fairly different forms of behaviour, this passage suggests that behaviour should not be restricted to a few forms of overt response.

Pitcher, in turn, takes movement across space as a paradigmatic way of behaviour triggered by perceptual states. To illustrate the point, he asks us to consider an example of a normal perceiver (say, an unimpaired, adult human being) staring at a straight line in more or less optimal conditions: in this case, the subject sees the line and the latter looks straight to her. For this individual, being perceptually aware of the line is to an important extent defined by the possibility of interacting with that object in numerous ways: to reach for it with a hand, to walk closer to or away from it, etc. According to Pitcher, a subject *S* manifests the instantiation of a visual state about an item *O* when she proves to be capable of navigating her surroundings and of spatially interacting with *O* in a complex number of ways – that is, when *S*'s movement across space suggests that she is sensitive to *O* (cf. Pitcher 1971, 153). Pitcher himself acknowledges that this sort of description is bound to be schematic, as it 'is not possible to list the indefinitely many different movements that would be relevant', even in the most simple cases of visual perception (Pitcher 1971, 153). But even though it is impossible to catalogue all the ways in which perceptual states may manifest themselves, I think that the relevant analysis would partially be vindicated by conceding two things: first, that there is a constitutive relation between perceptual states and behaviour;

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<sup>18</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I shall avoid mentioning the organic component from now on: unless otherwise stated, I shall assume that the relevant behaviour depends on informational transactions occurring via the relevant sense-organs.

and, secondly, that, given a certain token of behaviour, it is possible to determine whether it could be related to perceptual states of a certain kind or not. Furthermore, while Pitcher takes locomotion to be a paradigmatic form of responsive behaviour, he does not assume that it exhausts such behavioural manifestations.

To generalize from the previous remarks, the behavioural manifestations of perceptual states could in principle take multiple shapes. That is, there are not only many ways of discriminating and moving around one's own surroundings: there are also many forms of behaviour in addition to discrimination and locomotion. As far as I can see, the effect that perceptual states may have on other psychological states or events (e.g. beliefs, desires, etc.) counts as a covert form of behaviour. Again, when the relevant subject is a language-user, then her perceptual states could affect her linguistic performances. As previously mentioned, the relationship between perceptual states and their possible forms of behavioural manifestation is a constitutive one: that is, such forms of behaviour are constitutive components, not extrinsic evidence – in Wittgenstein's terminology, symptoms (cf. McDowell 1984) –, of the relevant states. True: it would be naïve to expect that a philosophical account of perception could do anything more than to provide a general sketch of such constitutive links. But one could extrapolate and apply here a point made by Davidson in relation to beliefs (cf. Davidson 1982, 322): to identify or ascribe perceptual experiences, it is not necessary to observe a very complex pattern of behaviour, but only to observe evidence pointing to the existence of such a pattern.<sup>19</sup>

The idea the foregoing considerations partially intend to support is that the type-specification and ascription of perceptual states heavily relies on the role that such psychological items play within a larger psychological and epistemic economy. The second theme this section is concerned with is the compatibility between (S) and an episodic view of perceptual experience, that is, one according to which perceptual experiences are events. To address this point, recall that I

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<sup>19</sup> By means of the foregoing remarks, I do not mean to suggest that only a stative conception captures the logical link between perceptual experience and behaviour: I am tempted to think that any adequate view of perceptual experience should be capable of doing so. In chapter 3, however, I suggest that it is unclear how a processive conception could secure that logical connection (cf. chapter 3.2).

associated the notion of event to those of occurrence and process. To a first approximation, events and occurrences refer to happenings or changes. While it is often clear what the object or the subject of change may be, it need not always be so: even though an explosion may uncontroversially involve a particular house or car, it is by no means obvious what the subject/object of the constant expansion of the universe or WWII is. Again, events or occurrences are either temporally protracted or durationless. Suitable answers to the question 'What happened to Jim' include 'He saw a star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ ' (temporally extended) and 'He spotted a star' (durationless or instantaneous). Indeed, these replies refer to happenings or changes which take place in Jim.

Of course, O'Shaughnessy binds the notion of event to that of process: according to him, all temporally extended events are processive, and experiential events are necessarily or irreducibly so (see chapter 1.2). In that context, however, I argued that it is not obvious why experiential events are irreducibly processive. Related to this point, one could also claim now that a broad understanding of events as happenings or changes does not specify whether temporally extended events are processive or stative: for all we know, such changes or happenings may be described in terms of states. Jaegwon Kim espouses an episodic view along such lines (cf. Kim 1976). According to him, events are primarily changes which obtain in a subject: as such, it is possible to think of a given event as a function of three constitutive elements – a subject, an instantiated property, and a time. Since it is natural to understand states as instantiated properties or relations, Kim's position seems to be such that it accommodates the categories of event and of state. For example, while being feverish or being in pain are states in which a living organism may be, they are also happenings or changes taking place in a subject. In principle, I think one could use the same model in order to argue that being perceptually aware of one's own surroundings – that is, having perceptual experiences – is stative as well as episodic.

In fairness to O'Shaughnessy, Kim is not absolutely clear on how the notions of property, state, and condition capture the dynamic import of events. But at this point one may invoke a notion I introduced in the last chapter, namely, that of process-dependent states. Soteriou exploits it in order to defend a hybrid theory



of perceptual experiences: according to him, perceptual awareness should be understood in terms of experiential states constituted by phenomenally conscious processes. Again, discussing O'Shaughnessy's motivations to defend (P), I argued that mental states the existence of which depends on the existence of sub-personal processes could accommodate the case of total mental freeze. Thanks to this notion – about which I say more in the next section – it should be relatively clear how the obtaining of states does not cancel the dynamic aspect of events.

Hence, even if perceptual experiences are not conceived as protracted happenings of a certain processive kind – more specifically, if they are conceived as mental states – there are still two senses in which they entail mental events. First, events may be understood as durationless happenings or changes (that is, as Vendler's 'achievements'), as the coming to be or passing away of a state, or as the initiating or terminating of a process. In this sense, perceptual states do involve mental events, for they tend to be punctuated by durationless occurrences marking the coming to be and the passing away of such states: in general, a perceiver will have moved to a state of perceptual awareness from a state in which she is not so related to her surroundings, as when Jim spots a bright star. Armstrong highlights this point by drawing a distinction between perceptual experiences and perceptions: resigned to accept that perceptual experiences – that is, the instantiation of perceptual states over a period of time – are not events, he goes on to claim that perceptions – that is, the very acquiring of the relevant states – are episodic (cf. Armstrong 1968, 214). However, pace Armstrong now, I do not think that (S) has to abandon an episodic stance: if events primarily pick up on changes or happenings, there is a natural sense in which perceptual experiences, conceived as process-dependent states, constitute changes (i.e. events) taking place in a certain subject. By pursuing this line of thought, one could save the episodic status of Jim's spotting the star as well as of his temporally protracted seeing. A stative view is thus capable of accommodating the thought that temporally extended perceptual experiences are events.

To wrap things up, let's revisit the main example I used throughout chapter 1. On a cloudy night, a vigilant sailor, Jim, stares at the dark skies. What does he see? He answers: 'I don't see a thing'. A bit later, it clears up and we ask the same

question again: now he claims 'I see a star'. Jim spots the star, and, after that, he stands in a relation of perceptual awareness with the luminous object from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ . According to the stative conception, Jim is the subject of a durationless or instantaneous event when he spots the star, when he engages in an informational link with it: before  $t_1$ , he was not consciously sensitive to the star; from  $t_1$  onwards, he stands in a certain state for as long as he instantiates the relevant informational relation. According to (S), the experience in perception is an instantiated mental state. Jim has thereby acquired a state in virtue of which he can behave in a number of different ways in relation to the star: he can discriminate it from other objects; he can tell us about it; he can steer the ship towards or away from it; and so on. While seeing the star, in the spotting sense, is an instantaneous event, seeing a worldly item during a period of time involves a temporally extended experience, the latter being an episodic mental state thanks to which Jim is or could be responsive to the star. The stative conception by no means assumes that nothing else occurs while he is in that state. As Vendler notes, 'many things happened in the world and in the sailor' (Vendler 1957, 160). In the world, clouds moved across the sky, star-light travelled through space and time, and so on. In the sailor, his eyes engaged in numerous saccadic movements, complex physiological processes downstream of his visual system took place, sub-personal and personal mechanisms came into operation, and so on. A stative conception of perceptual experiences only holds that Jim's visual experience is not itself fundamentally a process. Neither spotting nor temporally extended seeing are mental processes: the former refers to an achievement; the latter, to a mental state obtaining over a period of time.

Summing up, this section introduced a general framework for a stative conception of perceptual experiences. To do so, I borrowed several elements from Armstrong's and Pitcher's belief-theories of perception: without endorsing that position, I extracted a general template from it, so as to articulate the stative framework I defend throughout this dissertation. Within this context, I have stressed two specific points: first, that a functional analysis is crucial for the type-specification and ascription of perceptual states; and, secondly, that a stative view may accommodate the episodic character of temporally extended experiences. Of

course, this discussion is by no means exhaustive. In the next section, I throw further light on the ontological significance of (S) by saying more about the notion of perceptual state just outlined.

## II. THAU ON INSTANTIAL AND INTERNAL STATES

A guiding claim of this dissertation is that, although (S) and (P) are not incompatible positions, (P) posits a category of experiential items we need not and should not commit to. Ultimately, I wish to hold that a stative view of perceptual experiences is more ontologically austere and less problematic than the processive stance. In pursuit of this general goal, chapter 1 argued that the relevant perceptual processes do constitute a domain of entities irreducible into mental states. That said, it is yet unclear how perceptual states are less ontologically demanding than perceptual processes. I address this issue next: to throw light on the ontological status of the relevant states, I shall specifically invoke the notion of *instantial* states.

In an attempt to move away from neo-Fregean accounts of perception and belief, Michael Thau draws a line between *instantial* and *internal* states. From an ontological point of view, the distinction presupposes that there are properties and relations, both being understood as abstract entities instantiated by groups of particular items. For my present purposes, I shall assume that we live in a world of substances, properties, and relations; but remain neutral on what metaphysics of properties and relations we should endorse. That said, Thau describes *instantial* states as follows:

[...] there is trivially a state whenever something has a property or whenever two (or more) things bear a relation to one another because there being a state, in one sense of the term, just amounts to the thing's or things' instantiating the property or relation. The state of the tomato's being red is not some second thing distinct from the tomato in virtue of which it is red; rather, it's nothing more than the tomato's being red. The state of Ben and Marie being married is not some third thing distinct from Ben and Marie in virtue of which they are married; rather, it's nothing more than their being married. And the state of Joe and Mike's being the same height isn't some third thing distinct from Joe and Mike in virtue of which they are the same height; rather, it's nothing more than their being the same height. [...] Let's call those states that are nothing over and above some thing's or things' instantiating a property or relation *instantial states*. (Thau 2002, 60-1)

The main thought seems to be that there is a sense in which states are ontologically austere items: once substances, properties, and relations are taken for granted, states should not be conceived as items over and above the combination of substances, properties, and relations. For example, being red is a state in which a tomato stands when it instantiates the property of redness: it is not a third item which somehow glues the property of redness to a particular tomato. Likewise, Ben's being married to Marie is a state which obtains in virtue of an instantiated relation, with Ben and Marie as the relevant relata: it is not a further element alongside the relation of marriage, Ben, and Marie. Instantial states are thereby defined as the instantiation of properties or relations by a single individual or by a number of them. If we live in a world of substances, properties, and relations, the existence of instancial states does not involve a robust ontological commitment: as Thau dramatically puts it, such states 'are nothing over and above some thing's or things' instantiating a property or relation'. Thus phrased, the notion of instancial states might seem to give way to a reductive or eliminativist analysis of states in terms of substances, properties, and relations. This need not be the case, though: the thought may just be that states are ordered sets of objects, properties or relations, and times.<sup>20</sup> Instancial states may not stand at the same ontological level as objects, properties, relations, and times: this does not, however, mean that they are unreal. By contrast, internal states are ontologically robust, for they pick up on 'a proper part, or the condition of some proper part, of an individual.' (Thau 2002, 61) Thus understood, states do not obtain merely when a thing or a group of things instantiates a property or a relation: they are either sub-parts of a given object or properties/relations instantiated by objects or their sub-parts.

According to Thau, a notable fallacy in the philosophy of mind concerns the above distinction: for, while philosophers tend to model beliefs and perceptual experiences as mental states, it is often unclear whether such states are instancial or internal ones. There is a harmless sense in which those psychological items are indeed states: beliefs and perceptual experiences do involve relations between subjects and propositional or experiential contents; as such, the relevant subjects

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<sup>20</sup> I thank Henry Clarke for stressing this point.

instantiate relations in virtue of which they come to be in certain states. Beliefs and perceptual experiences may simply pick up on such instantial states. However, Thau goes on to stress that, since the instantial-internal distinction is often overlooked, the previous commitment is easily confused for a commitment to internal states. Thus, the fallacy he purports to identify is the mistake of taking evidence in favour of instantial states for evidence in favour of internal states. This mistake, termed by Thau the *particularizing fallacy*, springs from a generalized failure to appreciate the different ontological imports of instantial and internal states.

Whereas I do not intend to pursue Thau's non-Fregean philosophical project or, more specifically, his diagnosis of the particularizing fallacy, I shall use the notion of instantial states to throw light on the ontological difference between perceptual processes and perceptual states. According to O'Shaughnessy and Soteriou, perceptual processes could not be captured by an ontology of substances, properties/relations, and states: according to them, phenomenally conscious perceptual processes constitute a substantive and irreducible addition to our ontological framework. With Thau's distinction at hand, it is now possible to spell out the sense in which perceptual states are ontologically austere vis-à-vis the previous category of processes: perceptual experiences may be understood as mental states, the latter being in turn understood as instantiations of properties or relations by certain subjects at times. Thus understood, perceptual experiences are functions or ordered sets of subjects, relations, and times. Experiential items would not thereby be reduced or eliminated in favour of its constitutive components: an ordered set of constituents is not the same as their disconnected sum. But the notion of instantial states does constrain the ontological impact that perceptual experiences would otherwise have on our ontology if conceived as phenomenally conscious processes: such psychological items constitute only a small addition to an ontology already containing perceivers and informational relations between these subjects and their surroundings.

If perceptual experiences are modelled as instantial states, which specific relations do they depend on? It is natural to think that perceptual experiences depend on the instantiation of relations by perceivers at times: more specifically, of

informational relations between perceivers and their surroundings. Recall that chapter 1 took off from a distinction between perceiving and experiencing. In a nutshell, the thought was that perceptual experiences should be understood as a component – a crucial one, but a component nevertheless – by means of which philosophers and psychologists describe the conscious dimension of perceptual phenomena like seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on. At this point, it should be clear that the instantiated relation I am looking for is just the informational relation established between a perceiver and her surroundings when she perceives (i.e. sees, hears, smells) her surroundings. Indeed, Armstrong is not alone when stressing that '[p]erception is a flow of information, a flow that goes on the whole time that we are not completely unconscious.' (Armstrong 1968, 226) As far as I can see, this is one of the few fundamental points about perceptual phenomena on which the philosopher and the psychologist alike agree. One could thereby specify the relationship between perceiving and experiencing as follows: perception may be understood as the informational interaction between a subject and her surroundings, an interaction in virtue of which the relevant subject comes to be in a particular state vis-à-vis her environs; perceptual experiences, meanwhile, correspond to such states, the latter being understood as the instantiation of the aforementioned informational relation.<sup>21</sup>

Summing up, this section focused on specifying the ontological import of perceptual states. To do so, I invoked Thau's notion of instantial state. With this resource at hand, I went to argue that the mental states at the core of the position I defend here should be conceived as instantial ones. It seems to me that this qualification throws light on the way in which the relevant notion of state relates to the more familiar categories of properties and relations: but, more importantly, it clarifies the sense in which (S) commits us to an ontology of perception far more

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21 Granted: the model just outlined in this paragraph cannot be extrapolated to the now classical cases of hallucinatory experiences: when Macbeth sees a bloody dagger, there is an obvious sense in which he fails to stand in the relevant sort of informational relation with a worldly item – there is nothing but thin air where he seems to see the dagger! Although this dissertation does not tackle the delicate relationship between veridical and hallucinatory experiences, the previous difficulty does not seem damning. As far as I can see, one could explore different suggestions: for example, denying that there are perceptual experiences such as those envisaged by philosophers in cases of perfect hallucination (cf. Fish 2009); or, less radically, conceding that there are hallucinatory experiences, but then highlighting their 'parasitic' nature vis-à-vis veridical experiences (cf. Hinton 1967, 1973; Snowdon 1980-1).

austere than the one underpinning (P). In a world where there are already substances – among them, subjects of thoughts and experiences – and instantiated properties and relations, there is much less at risk when one postulates instantial states than when one postulates phenomenally conscious processes. Of course, this is not on its own a reason to reject a processive ontology, but it sets the ground for the line of criticism I pursue throughout this dissertation.

### III. PERCEPTUAL STATES AND TEMPORAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Now I turn to the relationship between perceptual states and the temporal phenomenology of perceptual experiences. To access this theme, recall that a crucial motivation behind Soteriou's ontology of perception is phenomenological (cf. chapter 1.3). In a nutshell, the thought is that the notion of occurrent perceptual states – that is, the notion of perceptual states constitutively dependent on processes of a phenomenally conscious kind – accommodates three claims: first, that the temporal features of perceptual experiences are transparent to introspection; secondly, that certain objects of perception seem to be temporally extended; and thirdly, that temporally extended perceptual experiences seem to be continuous. To capture the phenomenological picture resulting from these claims, Soteriou builds his own account of perceptual experiences around the notion of occurrent (or process-dependent) perceptual state. But what happens if one dispenses with phenomenally conscious processes? This is the question I address here. The section will move in two stages: to begin with, I stress the main difference between my and Soteriou's version of the stative view; then, I show how this difference affects our allegiances towards the aforementioned claims. My overall position is that the most important elements of Soteriou's phenomenological picture are accommodated within my framework.

Chapter 1 distinguished two antagonist ontologies of perception: on the one hand, Vendler's work suggests a view according to which perceptual experiences should not be conceived as happenings of a processive kind, but as mental states; on the other, O'Shaughnessy formulates and defends precisely the

sort of processive stance that Vendler would have rejected. By integrating a stative as well as a processive component into one ontological view, Soteriou opens a middle course: according to him, perceptual experiences are mental states, where such states constitutively depend on processes of a phenomenally conscious kind. As I previously explained, a key motivation behind this position concerns the phenomenological limitations of the more radical approaches: while Vendler's perceptual states do not seem to accommodate the temporal transparency and apparent continuity of perceptual experiences; O'Shaughnessy's perceptual processes could not capture the fact that certain objects of perception seem to be temporally extended. Against this problematic background, the notion of occurrent (i.e. process-dependent) perceptual state is intended to save the best parts of Vendler's and O'Shaughnessy's views without their corresponding limitations.

Although both Soteriou and I rely on the notion of process-dependent states, our views and motivations also differ in important respects. To begin with, I think that the processes on which perceptual states rest do not have to be of a phenomenally conscious kind. Pace O'Shaughnessy, I argued that perceptual experiences need not be processes: they may simply be related to them via a relation of constitutive dependence. But, pace Soteriou, the processes perceptual experiences thus depend on need not be phenomenally conscious: they could just be the neuro-biological occurrences in virtue of which perceivers stand in certain informational relations to their surroundings. As Vendler nicely puts it: when Jim sees a bright star during a period of time, many things go on in the world and in his head; a perceptual experience is not one of them. Of course, the point is not to deny the existence of perceptual experiences, but to suggest that such psychological items may fall into the non-processive category of mental states. And Vendler is not alone on this position. Daniel Dennett, for example, hints at a similar view when he writes that '[c]onscious experience, in our view, is a succession of states constituted by various processes occurring in the brain, and not something over and above that is caused by them.' (Dennett 1998, 136)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to Soteriou, Dennett's rejection of phenomenally conscious events/processes is fuelled by an attempt to specify perceptual contents relative to temporally extended experiences, not relative to experiences at a given time: 'Dennett's objections to the notion of a stream of phenomenally conscious experience appear to be premised on the idea that the relevant notion of a stream of conscious experience should be understood on the model of a successive series of events with determinate personal-level contents, according to which it is possible to identify, at



In short, a key difference between my position and Soteriou's is that I dispense with processes of a phenomenally conscious kind in order to describe perceptual experiences. But how does a stative view along these lines deal with the phenomenological picture which Soteriou aims to accommodate? The relevant facts were three: the temporal transparency of perceptual experience, the apparent temporal extension of certain objects of perception, and the continuity of temporally extended experiences. Since Soteriou concedes that the second fact is compatible with non-occurrent perceptual states, I shall assume here that it poses no difficulties. The temporal transparency and the temporal continuity of perceptual experiences are, however, a different matter, for they seem to fall beyond the ken of (non-occurrent) perceptual states: this is the reason why Soteriou conceives perceptual experiences as states constitutively dependent on phenomenally conscious processes: the latter processes would accommodate temporal transparency and temporal continuity. While I also invoke process-dependent states, I do so for a different reason, namely, to express the dynamic character of perceptual experiences (cf. chapter 1.2 and section 1 of this chapter). As previously mentioned, the notion I thus use does not rely on phenomenally conscious processes. Furthermore, I have also put some pressure on Soteriou's attempt to ground perceptual processes on a phenomenological basis (cf. chapter 1.3). To complete this line of reasoning, it is time to address how my stative view fares with the problematic elements of Soteriou's phenomenological picture.

Let's first consider why Soteriou thinks that perceptual states cannot on their own deal with the temporal transparency and the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences. Assuming that both perceptual experiences and certain objects of experience are temporally extended, he poses the following problem:

If we appeal to the obtaining of some perceptual state of the subject in order to account for the fact that it seems to him as though he is perceptually aware of an occurrence O with temporal extension, rather than an instantaneous temporal part of O, then this might be thought to be in tension with the phenomenological claim that each temporal part of O

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a time, *the* content of a particular mental occurrence in the stream of conscious experience that occurs at that time.' (Soteriou 2013, 146) Although Soteriou is right on this local point, it is important to stress another theme at work here: one of Dennett's overarching goals is to account for conscious experience without the need of invoking suspicious items such as sense-data or qualia (cf. Dennett 1991). I suspect that, for Dennett, phenomenally conscious events/processes fall within the category of such entia non grata.

seems to be concurrent with his awareness of it. Since a perceptual state of the subject—its seeming to him as though he is aware of an occurrence *O* with temporal extension—is not something that unfolds over an interval of time,  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , one might think that it *continues* to *obtain throughout* the interval of time  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ . In which case, it looks as though we do not then capture the idea that what seemed to the subject to be the case during sub-intervals of that interval of time was different. It looks as though he was merely aware of a temporal part of *O*, during the sub-interval  $t_2$ – $t_3$  it seemed to *S* as though he was aware of a different temporal part of *O*, and so on. In which case it looks as though we do not capture the temporal transparency of experience. (Soteriou 2011, 494; also cf. 495)

Although Soteriou's objection is rather delicate, it apparently concerns perceptual states' inability to reflect our awareness of a changing world. Let me expand on this issue.

As the previous quote makes it clear, Soteriou assumes that perceptual experiences as well as some of the things we experience are temporally extended. In addition, I suspect there is another crucial premise at work here, namely, the fact that, whether we perceive temporally extended items or not, our perceptual experiences tend to be about many different things. From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment we fall asleep at night, our conscious lives are usually stormed by a succession of worldly items. In other words, change pervades the content of temporally extended experiences. This point is crucial, for Soteriou's intention is, very crudely put, to drive a wedge between the changing character of the things we perceive over time and the unchanging character of perceptual states. As stressed in the above quote, states obtain at a time or continue to obtain over a period of time: unlike processes, they do not unfold or progress. After Susan Rothstein's work (cf. Rothstein 2004), Soteriou takes this to mean that there is a natural sense in which non-occurrent perceptual states exclude change. Furthermore, he also takes it to mean that the content of perceptual states is fixed in a way that excludes the sort of change we are normally aware of when perceiving the world: after all, perceptual states result from the instantiation of informational relations between a subject and certain worldly items, and what it means for them to persist is simply to continue to obtain, that is, to sustain the same informational bridge between that subject and those worldly items. Let's consider a specific perceptual scenario to illustrate this point. From the moment you open your eyes in the morning to the moment you close them at night, you see a great deal of things. For the sake of simplicity, however, imagine that a subject

opens her eyes in order to encounter a simple drawing of a banana on a white background from  $t_1$  to  $t_5$ , the banana being replaced by a simple drawing of an apple from  $t_6$  to  $t_{10}$ . With this case at hand, Soteriou's objection might read as follows: if a subject stands in one and the same perceptual state from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , this means that she stands in an informational relation to the same worldly items, that is, a banana or a more complex set which may be expressed by the conjunction [banana & apple]; either way, this understanding of perceptual experiences would not capture the dynamic character of what we are perceptually aware of, that is, the fact that the relevant subject sees a banana from  $t_1$  to  $t_5$  and an apple from  $t_6$  to  $t_{10}$ . Since this line of reasoning assumes that the relevant subject stands in one and the same mental state from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , one might try to counteract Soteriou's point by arguing that temporally extended perceptual experiences should not be thought as one and the same state obtaining over a sustained or continuous period of consciousness, but as a succession of states defined by their corresponding contents. That being the case, the above example would not involve a single token-state ranging over a banana and an apple from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , but two token-states: one obtaining from  $t_1$  to  $t_5$  and concerning a banana, and another obtaining from  $t_6$  to  $t_{10}$  and concerning an apple. But Soteriou foresees this potential reply and correctly recoils by saying that, if temporally extended perceptual experiences are conceived as a succession of different token-states, a stative view could not accommodate the fact that certain objects of perceptual experiences appear to be temporally extended (cf. Soteriou 2011, 494).

In a nutshell, the key difficulty may be expressed as follows: what we are perceptually aware of shows change or variation over time; but, to the extent that they obtain or continue obtaining (as opposed to unfolding), perceptual states could not accommodate the worldly variations thus presented to us. How does this tension relate to the question whether non-occurrent perceptual states could accommodate the temporal transparency and the temporal continuity of perceptual experiences? In relation to temporal transparency, recall its positive component: introspective reflection of our perceptual experiences makes the worldly items our perceptual experiences are about manifest. Since perceptual experiences and certain objects of perception are temporally extended, introspective reflection of

our perceptual experiences should pick up on the worldly items concurrent with such experiences. According to Soteriou, something like Vendler's ontology of experiences fails to capture the latter phenomenological fact, for non-occurrent perceptual states are not suitably related to the worldly items concurrent with our temporally extended experiences. Again, since non-occurrent perceptual states do not unfold or progress, but only obtain or continue to obtain, it is unclear how they could capture the fact that temporally protracted experiences seem to be continuous.

With Soteriou's charge in place, I now move on to argue that it is unpersuasive. As I have already mentioned, Soteriou thinks that non-occurrent perceptual states fail to accommodate temporal transparency because they do not reflect the diversity of those worldly items we are perceptually aware of over time. But the latter claim could well be rejected: in particular, one could simply build the aforementioned variety within the content of perceptual states. Although perceptual states do not unfold over time, one could argue that a stative view still captures the diversity of the things we perceive to the extent that the contents of perceptual states incorporate that dynamic dimension. In other words, although I do recognize that perceptual states do not change, in the sense that they do not unfold or they fail to be processive, Soteriou provides no reason to think that their 'static' character determines or otherwise transpires into their corresponding contents.<sup>23</sup> As far as I can see, a subject could stand in one and the same sort of relation to different items in her environment.

To throw further light on the present suggestion, let's consider what I take to be one incorrect way of implementing it. Elaborating on the line of criticism at stake, Soteriou compares perceptual experiences and beliefs:

In a case in which a subject believes that  $p$  from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , and then believes that  $q$  from  $t_{10}$  to  $t_{20}$ , we do not regard these belief states as temporal parts of some further belief that obtains from  $t_1$  to  $t_{20}$ . For example, we do not regard this as a case in which the subject has

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<sup>23</sup> This line of thought owes to Michael Tye's one-experience view (cf. Tye 2003). After arguing that there is a single temporally extended experience for every period of uninterrupted conscious stream, Tye addresses the question why we seem to have many experiences instead of one over time and across different sensory modalities: in reply, he builds the apparent differences into the content of experiences. My suggestion is structurally similar to Tye's proposal.

a belief that  $p \ \& \ q$  from  $t_1$  to  $t_{20}$ . Similar considerations may lead us to think that the distinct, successive perceptual states that obtain during a period of time that a subject is conscious should not be thought of as different temporal parts of one experience. (Soteriou 2011, 493-4)

The target of this passage is precisely the idea that a temporally extended perceptual experience could be understood in terms of a single, temporally protracted perceptual state, the content of which ranges over different worldly items or states of affairs. For that purpose, Soteriou asks us to imagine its doxastic counterpart: it is simply implausible to think that a subject's cognitive life, when she believes  $p$  from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$  and  $q$  from  $t_{11}$  to  $t_{20}$ , could be analysed in terms of the possession of a single belief ranging over  $p$  and  $q$ . Likewise, it would be implausible to analyse a temporally extended perceptual experience concerning different worldly items in terms of a single mental state, the content of which ranges over a conjunction of worldly items. Hence, this line of reasoning apparently undermines the possibility of building the diversity of what we are perceptually aware of into the content of non-occurrent perceptual states.

Soteriou is right in rejecting the previous way of implementing a stative analysis of experiences. But his target is a bit crude: one could definitely improve on it. When a temporally extended perceptual experience is conceived as a temporally extended state ranging over a succession of worldly items, its content should not be conceived as a mere conjunction of the relevant worldly items, but as an ordered set of worldly items or states of affairs indexed to the intervals of time at which they exist. So, to build on Soteriou's remarks, one should not think of the subject in my previous example as one who stands in the same type of perceptual state from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , a state with the content [banana & apple]: instead, one should think of it as one where the relevant subject stands in a state with a more complex content, a content which might roughly be expressed as [(banana,  $t_1$ - $t_5$ ) & (apple,  $t_6$ - $t_{10}$ )]. The point of this reformulation is to incorporate temporal features into the content of perceptual states: of course, not temporal properties of the very perceptual state – they are transparent, after all – but features of the worldly items that the relevant subject is aware of. Hence, although non-occurrent perceptual states do not unfold or progress, a stative view could still accommodate those temporal variations manifest to introspection as features of the world we are

perceptually conscious of.

With the foregoing considerations in place, how would a stative view deal with the temporal transparency and the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences? As far as I can see, a stative ontology accommodates the transparency claim. Even if temporally extended perceptual states do not unfold or progress, the things we are aware of could still do so. That is, we could instantiate one and the same type of informational relation to an ever-changing reality: the fact that such a reality changes all the time does not mean that our awareness of it concurrently changes, but only that the contents of our perceptual experiences are indexed to times. What a subject is aware of – that is, the content of the relevant perceptual state – is not only a function of the worldly items she is related to, but a function of such items and certain times or intervals of time to which such items are specifically related.<sup>24</sup> For example, when the above subject stands in a perceptual state from  $t_1$  to  $t_{10}$ , this does not mean that he is perceptually or introspectively aware of a banana and an apple at each moment of this interval of time: since the content of her temporally extended state is temporally indexed, she can be aware of a banana's existing during  $t_1$ - $t_5$ , and of an apple's existing from  $t_6$ - $t_{10}$ . Thus understood, perceptual states seem to accommodate the idea of temporal transparency: introspection of such states could make the diverse succession of worldly items over time manifest to a subject, and it could do so in such a way that the temporal properties of these perceptual states are transparent or diaphanous to a subject's introspective capacities.

Since non-occurrent perceptual states obtain or continue to obtain, they cannot accommodate the phenomenological fact to the effect that perceptual experiences seem to be continuous over time. And yet a stative ontology could capture a similar intuition: perceptual states do not unfold, and hence, apparently lack the sort of temporal continuity invoked by Soteriou; but temporal features, such as succession and continuity over time, could still be features of the world presented to a subject of experiences. When Jim sees a star from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , his visual experience of that object seems to be continuous over that period of time. To accommodate this phenomenological fact, Soteriou holds that Jim's visual

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<sup>24</sup> Also cf. Campbell 2011 for a similar point on perceptual content.

experience is temporally continuous. By contrast, my suggestion is that the temporal structure of this temporally protracted experience may to a good extent be constituted by the temporal structure of the worldly items combined within Jim's field of sight. The foregoing remarks on temporal transparency and the present proposal thus follow a similar strategy: after setting the temporal structure of perceptual experiences apart from the temporal structure of the things we are perceptually aware of, I went on to argue that a stative view could accommodate the manifest temporal structure of perceptual experiences as properties which feature in the content of perceptual states.

Before moving on, two points of clarification are in order. First, the foregoing remarks may suggest that my stative position entails an implausible stance on the question how perceptual experiences should be ascribed to their respective subjects.<sup>25</sup> I previously stated that temporally extended experiences could be understood as perceptual states, the content of which incorporates not only a wide range of worldly items, but also the temporal intervals relative to which such items are indexed. As such, my stative position apparently makes room for the possibility of saddling a subject with experiences, the content of which involve items that the relevant subject has already perceived in the past or, even worse, items that she has not perceived yet. For example, if a subject perceives a banana from  $t_1$  to  $t_5$  and an apple from  $t_6$  to  $t_{10}$ , my position seems to ascribe to her an experience concerning a banana and an apple at a time when she has not yet perceived the apple – say, at  $t_3$  or  $t_4$ . Again, Jim instantiates an informational relation vis-à-vis a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$  in virtue of which, at  $t_3$ , one could ascribe to him a state about how the star looks like at some later time,  $t_x$ , where  $3 < x < n$ . Since the stative view I previously sketched allows for such ascriptive practices, it might be deemed far too strange or implausible.

In reply, it is unclear to me why a stative view would have any such consequences. The proposal I have made throughout this section concerns the nature of perceptual states: after all, (S) answers to the question what perceptual experiences are. Within this context, I have argued that perceptual states could range over temporally indexed contents. By contrast, the ascription of perceptual

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<sup>25</sup> I thank Professor Soteriou for pressing this worry in conversation.

experiences relates to specific linguistic and social practices in which we engage: as such, they are determined by what we know about subjects and their surroundings from our very particular and limited perspectives. Although such practices concern perceptual experiences, the ways in which we think and speak about such psychological items need not mirror an answer to the question what perceptual experiences are. Since we lack foreknowledge, it is clearly impossible to ascribe experiences about things yet to be perceived to our fellow human beings. But this is perfectly compatible with the thought that temporally extended experiences themselves (that is, as opposed to the ways in which we think and talk about them) are mental states, where such states continue obtaining over a period of time and concern temporally indexed items or states of affairs. As far as I can see, the temporal structure and the content of perceptual experiences are components of a philosophical story about perceptual awareness, not starting-points from which philosophical reflection takes off: as such, I think they need not answer to our ordinary understanding of perceptual phenomena.

Secondly, it might also be tempting to think that my stative view is a version of Tye's one-experience view, that is, a position according to which a subject undergoes a single perceptual experience for every uninterrupted interval of conscious, perceptual awareness. I admit that there is a loose sense in which one might indeed claim that a single perceptual state obtains for every uninterrupted period of perceptual awareness. However, it is crucial to note that, just like properties and dispositions, states are not countable in the same way substances or temporally extended events of a processive kind are so. Asking whether Jim has one or more visual states during  $t_1$ - $t_n$  is just as misplaced as, say, asking how many tokens of being-redness obtain in a ripe apple ripe over time. I return to this conceptual point in chapter 3 (cf. chapter 3.2-3), where I exploit it to motivate a case for the stative view over a processive one.

In short, the notion of perceptual state could accommodate what I take to be the most important elements of Soteriou's phenomenological picture. The latter picture cannot be a reason to endorse or reject either ontology of perception.



#### IV. OVER-INTELLECTUALIZING EXPERIENCE

To clarify the notion of perceptual state at stake, the remainder of this chapter will address two potential objections against the ontological stance here advocated. Both difficulties are related insofar as they exploit the fact that (S) comes close to assimilate perceiving to believing.

To begin with, let's turn to what may be called an *over-intellectualizing objection*. Belief-theories of perception such as those developed by Armstrong and Pitcher faced the charge of reducing perceptual experiences into beliefs, and hence, of over-intellectualizing perceptual phenomena. The unwelcome result is not the reductionist bit as such – after all, reductionist projects in philosophy have thrived over the past decades – but the attempt to analyse perceptual experiences in terms of the far more sophisticated category of belief. This complaint does not directly affect my stative position: as stressed earlier on, I do not seek to vindicate Armstrong's or Pitcher's position; in the present context, a belief-theory is only intended to constitute a template or general framework I use to develop a stative view further. Thanks to a natural assumption, however, the previous line of objection could also target my own stative ontology: one might think that every version of the stative view is a belief theory; in other words, one might be inclined to believe that perceptual states are always doxastic or cognitive states. If the suggestion is along the right lines, the position I defend here would also over-intellectualize perceptual phenomena. One way of addressing this objection consists in attacking the aforementioned assumption: that is, one could insist that there are versions of (S) which do not collapse into a belief theory of perception. Within this context, the present chapter might be seen as an attempt to deliver such a non-doxastic version of (S). This section, in turn, explores a different line of response: I shall assume that the position I advocate does indeed collapse into the sort of position espoused by Armstrong and Pitcher (worst possible scenario!), so as to argue that not even their views over-intellectualize perceptual experiences. The section will thus proceed as follows: after expanding a bit further on the relevant objection, I show that Armstrong's and Pitcher's belief-theories fail to over-intellectualize perceptual experiences, insofar as they rely on notions of belief

and concept way too undemanding to misrepresent perception.

Armstrong and Pitcher nominally defend belief-theories of perception: that is, they do spell out perceiving and having perceptual experiences in terms of belief-acquisition and belief-possession, respectively. Thus, Armstrong holds that 'perception is nothing but the acquiring of true or false beliefs concerning the current state of the organism's body and environment. [...] Veridical perception is the acquiring of true beliefs, sensory illusion the acquiring of false beliefs.' (Armstrong 1968, 209) Likewise, Pitcher claims that 'sense perception is the acquiring of true beliefs concerning particular facts about one's environment, by means of or by the use of, one's sense organs.' (Pitcher 1971, 65) Both writers crucially invoke the term 'belief' in order to illuminate the nature of perception. Again, I have also exploited this conceptual connection between perception and belief in order to present these theories as examples of (S): after all, a doxastic theory of perceptual experiences is one specific form that (S) may take.

Of course, Armstrong's and Pitcher's views are deemed to be problematic: on the face of it, it seems counter-intuitive to think that perceiving the world is anything as sophisticated as being in cognitive states like beliefs; very crudely put, having beliefs is a more psychologically sophisticated affair than having perceptual experiences.<sup>26</sup> Gareth Evans, for example, 'cannot help feeling that this gets things the wrong way round. It is as well to reserve 'belief' for the notion of a far more sophisticated cognitive state: one that is connected with (and, in my opinion, defined in terms of) the notion of *judgement*, and so, also, connected with the notion of *reasons*. The operations of the informational system are more primitive.' (Evans 1982, 124) For Evans, perceiving is an operation of a more primitive informational system: as such, its analysis should avoid using what he takes to be more sophisticated cognitive terms. In his characteristic style, John McDowell provides a gloss on Evans saying that 'we should reserve the idea of belief for something that can be understood only in the context of the idea of spontaneity, the idea of an active undertaking in which a subject takes rational control of the

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<sup>26</sup> Very crudely put, indeed: on closer inspection, it is far from clear what it means for belief-possession to be more sophisticated than experience-possession, this being partially a matter of what conditions a living organism must satisfy in order to possess concepts, and thereby, beliefs. For the sake of simplicity, I dodge this issue here.

shape of her thinking.' (McDowell 1994, 60) Although specifying exactly why an analysis of perception could not rely on the cognitive notion of belief is a delicate matter, I shall assume that Evans voices an intuitive concern. Notions like belief and judgement are closely related to the possibility of ascribing concepts to the relevant cognitive subjects: in other words, belief-possession necessitates a more or less developed conceptual repertoire. Since conditions of concept-possession are traditionally taken to be more stringent than those of experience-ownership, it seems intuitively misplaced to characterize perceptual experiences in terms of concept-dependent states like beliefs.<sup>27</sup> In principle, it is not hard to think of perceiving organisms which fail to qualify as subjects of propositional attitudes. Armstrong and Pitcher also highlight the connection between beliefs and concepts (cf. Armstrong 1968, 210; Pitcher 1971, 94). Hence, the resulting theories of perception seem intuitively unappealing: while they characterize perceptual experiences in terms of beliefs and concepts, it is much more natural to think that perceivers need not satisfy the conditions for the possession of concepts and beliefs.

Should I thus avoid using Armstrong's and Pitcher's views as templates for a stative view of perceptual experiences? I do not think so, for both writers understand belief and concept as notions far too rudimentary to over-intellectualize perception. Although they undeniably use the term 'belief' in order to clarify the notion of perceptual experience, it does not follow that the Evans objection applies to them. The key issue is not whether both philosophical camps invoke terms like 'belief' and 'concept' – this is merely a terminological issue – but whether they wield such terms in the same heavy-duty way. And the motivation behind my answer to the above question is that, in the specific context of developing a philosophical story of perception, Armstrong and Pitcher do not use the relevant terms as Evans suggests. Let me expand on this point.

A telling if rather circumstantial piece of evidence is that both belief-theorists are not blind to the Evans objection. Armstrong, for example, notes that the 'word 'belief' is a stumbling-block. To talk of beliefs may seem to be to talk in a

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, specifying the exact nature of the relationship between beliefs and concepts is a delicate issue (for discussion, cf. Crane 1992). I remain silent here on the question what the requirements of concept-possession are.

very sophisticated and self-conscious way, quite unsuited to such an unsophisticated thing as perception.' (Armstrong 1968, 209) He nevertheless continues using that word for two reasons: first, 'belief' is less inappropriate than other terms; and, secondly, this word is exchangeable with the term 'information' (cf. Armstrong 1968, 209-10). Pitcher, in turn, tries to circumvent the threat of over-intellectualizing perceptual experiences by distinguishing conscious beliefs (i.e. sophisticated cognitive states) from nonconscious ones (i.e. unsophisticated ones): the divide is precisely intended to set the cognitive connotations of sophisticated states aside.

More to the point, both philosophers explicitly outline the relevant cognitive notions in ways which do not match Evans's use. Although Armstrong claims that perceiving should be understood as the acquisition of perceptual beliefs, he also holds that perceptual beliefs are sub-verbal, that is, that such beliefs do not presuppose linguistic abilities: 'since perception can occur in the total absence of the ability to speak, we are committed to the view that there can be concepts that involve no linguistic ability' (Armstrong 1968, 210). Again, he takes the conditions of concept-possession underpinning the relevant beliefs to be much less demanding than Evans would allow. Armstrong would, for example, ascribe concepts to a baby interacting with blocks of different colours if the baby is taught to be systematically responsive to blocks of different colours.

Suppose that eventually the child reaches out for blue blocks, but never reaches out for green blocks. [...] Is not its behaviour a manifestation of a true belief, acquired by means of its eyes, that there is a difference in colour between the blue and the green blocks? And could it not be said to possess the *concepts* of blue and green, or at any rate the *concept* of the difference between blue and green, even if in a very primitive form? (Armstrong 1968, 246; also cf. Smith & Jones 1986, 104)

For Armstrong, a subject possesses a concept C if she is capable of behaving in systematic ways vis-à-vis worldly items which instantiate C and those which fail to do so: since acts of perceptual discrimination count as forms of behaviour, he is prepared to ascribe C to an organism if the latter is capable of discriminating C-instances from non-C-instances. In the above quote, a child shows mastery of colour concepts because it is capable of discriminating blue from

green objects. Although this constraint on concept-possession is not trivial, it is relatively undemanding: it allows for concept-ascriptions (say, to babies or other primitive creatures) which other theories of concept would forbid.

As previously mentioned, Pitcher characterizes perceptual phenomena in terms of beliefs, but specifies the relevant doxastic notion by means of a distinction between conscious and unconscious beliefs. While it is controversial to classify beliefs either as conscious or as unconscious (cf. Crane 2001), all Pitcher aims to do here is to draw a line between mental states that differ in cognitive sophistication. Thus, conscious beliefs are states we usually associate to conceptually sophisticated tasks, such as those 'of entertaining propositions and assenting to them, of making (conscious) judgments, or anything of that sort' (Pitcher 1971, 71). By contrast, having unconscious beliefs does not involve entertaining and assenting to propositions, or judging: 'to have a belief of this kind is to have a complex disposition to act (or behave) in certain ways under certain specifiable conditions.' (Pitcher 1971, 71) Like Armstrong, Pitcher aims to keep his notion of perceptual belief apart from sophisticated cognitive connotations. To pull this off, he characterizes perceptual experiences as unconscious beliefs.

There is, I think, enough textual evidence to show that Armstrong and Pitcher do not understand the notion of belief in the traditional sense, that is, as picking up on a cognitively sophisticated kind of state or propositional attitude. One could say that there are two notions of concept at stake here: on the one hand, the heavy-duty notion which most of us know and love (concept<sub>1</sub>, for short), that is, a notion that sets fully developed adults apart from babies and snails; and, on the other, a more rudimentary notion in relation to which even babies and certain lower-level creatures, such as cats and dogs, also possess concepts (concept<sub>2</sub>). Correspondingly, two notions of belief could be identified: a subject has beliefs<sub>1</sub> only if the latter presuppose the possession of concepts<sub>1</sub>; or beliefs<sub>2</sub>, only if they presuppose the possession of concepts<sub>2</sub>. With this pair of distinctions in mind, it should be clear that Evans is not really addressing Armstrong's and Pitcher's views: while an analysis of perception in terms of beliefs<sub>1</sub> may well be implausible, Armstrong's and Pitcher's belief-theories do not rely on beliefs<sub>1</sub>, but on the less demanding beliefs<sub>2</sub>. These theories do not seem as much to over-intellectualize

perception as to set perceptual experiences within a stative framework.

At this point, one could naturally object that, since the notion of belief used by Armstrong and Pitcher is so idiosyncratic, it fails to illuminate that of perceptual experience. Noting precisely such an idiosyncratic understanding of beliefs, Frank Jackson complains that the ontological significance of a belief-theory of perception is unclear:

One of the main aims of any belief analysis of perception is to avoid the Sense-datum theory's commitment to the existence of something *F* when something looks *F* to someone. The belief analysis achieves this because, despite the considerable controversy over the semantic structure of belief statements, we know enough about them to know that a statement like 'I believe (am inclined to believe) that there is something *F* in front of me' can be true without there being anything *F* in front of me. However, if the belief in question is not merely a common or garden one, but, rather, a special kind – a perceptual belief, where a perceptual belief is defined in terms of looking *F* – then the whole question of ontological commitment to there being an *F* is thrown back into the melting-pot. (Jackson 1977, 45)

Jackson is correct about a number of things. To begin with, Armstrong and Pitcher aim to avoid some of the ontological commitments made by certain subjectivist positions, e.g. sense-datum theories. Again, they do so by comparing or assimilating perceiving to believing. For example, since believing *p* does not entail that *p* is the case – a feature also known as the *non-factive* character of beliefs – one could (*mutatis mutandis*) argue that having visual experiences of *o* does not necessarily entail *o*'s existence, thus undermining a key assumption behind a sense-datum theory. Finally, Jackson correctly claims that Armstrong's and Pitcher's perceptual beliefs are not common or garden ones. But does it follow that an idiosyncratic understanding of beliefs undermines the ontological significance of belief-theories of perception?

In spite of the previous concessions, I think that Jackson's conclusion is too drastic. As far as I can see, the ontological significance of a belief-analysis turns on a different axis. In general, what matters is the stative character of the relevant perceptual beliefs: after all, no matter how exotic they may be, beliefs<sub>2</sub> still stand for mental states; and what a belief-analysis does for us is precisely to model perceptual experiences as mental states rather than mental particulars (e.g. mental events of a processive kind). More specifically, the ontological significance of a

belief-analysis rests on the non-factivity of doxastic attitudes. As the above quote itself shows, the effectiveness of a belief-analysis against sense-datum theories has nothing to do with the fact that beliefs are relatively sophisticated cognitive states: it has everything to do with the fact that those states are non-factive. Although beliefs<sub>2</sub> are not common or garden ones, they may still be conceived as non-factive. In short, relying on beliefs<sub>2</sub> does not affect the ontological advantages of theories like Armstrong's and Pitcher's.

To sum up, a stative view of perceptual experience need not over-intellectualize perceptual phenomena. Although Armstrong and Pitcher analyse perception in terms of beliefs, the latter states are understood here in an idiosyncratic way: by conceiving perceptual experiences as beliefs, they do not commit themselves to a counter-intuitive position. Evans's challenge would affect Armstrong and Pitcher only if the latter philosophers relied on beliefs<sub>1</sub> in order to spell out the notion of perceptual experience: since they resort to beliefs<sub>2</sub>, however, the previous objection does not apply to them. Even if my stative view collapses into Armstrong's or Pitcher's position, it need not over-intellectualize perception.

## V. THE ACTUALITY OF EXPERIENCES

A second line of objection also concerns (S)'s potential to assimilate perceiving to believing. There is an intuitive sense in which, while perceptual experiences are always actual, beliefs need not be so: that is, whereas it is natural (if not uncontroversial) to think that a subject's belief could exist in a dispositional way, it is unclear that perceptual experiences could be merely latent or anything less than manifest in a subject's stream of consciousness. This divide does not seem to be determined by the fact that beliefs are more sophisticated than perceptual experiences, but by the fact that beliefs are mental states. Hence, the worry is that a stative conception of perceptual experiences would obscure a distinction where experiences intuitively stand out as actual or manifest to consciousness. To address this difficulty, I shall describe it a bit further, and then, argue that, although the aforementioned difference is a legitimate one, it does not speak against a stative

ontology of perception.

A suitable starting-point is Armstrong's description of what I take to be a fairly traditional way of understanding beliefs:

To say that A believes  $p$  does not entail that there is anything going on in A's mind, or that A is engaged in any behaviour, which could be called a manifestation of A's belief. It makes sense to say that A believes  $p$ , but that A is asleep, or unconscious. It is true that there must be some difference in A's state of mind if he believes  $p$  from his state of mind if he does not believe  $p$ . But we need not know what that difference of state is, any more than we need know what is the difference in state between brittle glass and glass that is not brittle. Belief is a dispositional state of mind which endures for a greater or lesser length of time, and that may or may not manifest itself (either in consciousness or in behaviour) during that time. (Armstrong 1968, 213-4)

When I claimed that beliefs need not be actual, I just meant what Armstrong states have: if a subject S has a belief  $B(p)$  – where  $B(p)$  stands for a doxastic propositional attitude with content  $p$  –  $B(p)$  need not manifest itself in S's consciousness or behaviour. In principle, a subject could be sound asleep or unconscious and still own the relevant belief. By contrast, perceptual experiences seem to differ from beliefs precisely in that respect: in general, they are actual insofar as they are manifest to consciousness, if not in behaviour. For example, if Jim sees a star from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , he goes through a visual experience which exists in his mind actually, not merely dispositionally – that is, not merely as a liability to do something. Jim could not have the visual experience he has was he asleep or unconscious.

On the basis of the previous difference, it might be tempting to suppose that perceptual experiences do not belong to the same ontological kind as beliefs. In particular, it might be tempting to claim that beliefs are states, states being the kind of items which need not be so manifest, whereas experiences are the sort of items which are always manifest whenever they exist. Like O'Shaughnessy, one might then develop a processive view of experience. For present purposes, however, the crucial point is only this: on the assumption that beliefs constitute a paradigmatic form of mental states, perceptual experiences and beliefs do not belong to the same ontological category.

I think the following argument, (i)-(iv), is a fair representation of the above



line of reasoning:

- (i) Perceptual experiences are always actual, where 'actual' means being manifest in consciousness or behaviour.
- (ii) Beliefs need not be actual, where 'actual' has the same sense it has in (i).
- (iii) Mental states need not be actual.
- (iv) Hence, perceptual experiences are not mental states.

The question faced by the stative theorist is whether the intuitive difference represented by (i) and (ii) rules out the possibility of conceiving perceptual experiences as mental states. In other words, the question is whether (iv) follows from (i)-(iii). It is clear that it does not.

As just mentioned, I do not take issue with (i) and (ii). The problematic bit is whether (iii) guarantees the transition from (i)-(ii) to (iv). Even if (iii) is true, it does not follow that the feature of actuality is essential to every type of mental state: in principle, there might be kinds of states which could not exist in a merely dispositional or latent way. For example, if an object is red from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , being red is not the kind of state which that object could fail to manifest during  $t_1$ - $t_n$ . Again, it is natural to suppose that a subject is in pain only when that state is somehow manifest to her conscious life or her behavioural responses. In short, it seems possible to conceive physical and mental states (e.g. being red, being in pain) which are manifest to consciousness or behaviour whenever they obtain: a red apple does not stop being red when nobody sees it or when it is in a dark room; a person is not in pain when she is merely disposed to feel pain; and so on. The point behind these remarks is that it is far from clear that a feature of a certain stative type is necessary to every form of mental states. Granted: (iii) acknowledges a feature which a wide array of stative types (e.g. beliefs, desires, etc.) may share: a person could know that  $2 + 2 = 4$  even if she is not always thinking about that particular sum; or again, John may love Mary for four years even if he is not always self-conscious of his affections. But, as far as I can see, it does not follow

from this that every form of mental state behaves the same way: being in pain, for example, is stative but behaves differently. (iv) still has to be argued for.

Claims (i) and (ii) identify an intuitive difference – an intuitive ontological difference, as it were – between perceptual experiences and beliefs. So far, so good. Building on this divide, one may want to draw a substantive claim like (iv). The thought behind this inference is that the possibility of existing in a non-manifest or non-actual way is an essential trait of beliefs and other mental states: otherwise, it is unclear why perceptual experiences could not be states only because they fail to share the relevant feature. As Ryle suggests (cf. Ryle 1949, ch. 5), the category of mental states could be heterogeneous, in the sense that different stative types share different modal qualifications: some states may always be actual; others may, but need not, be actual or manifest. To rule out a stative conception of experiences, it is necessary (a) to pick up on ostensibly essential features of mental states, and (b) to show that experiences fail to possess them. Argument (i)-(iv) fails on (a): it is unclear why every kind of mental state has to satisfy the above discussed condition; in fact, there are examples suggesting that (iii) cannot be generalized. The suggestion is thus that the psychological divide captured by (i) and (ii) does not support (iv): that is, the aforementioned divide is silent on whether perceptual experiences and beliefs fall under different ontological categories.

The present line of reasoning also fits in with the stative view I sketched throughout this chapter. To address the charge that a stative view over-intellectualizes perceptual experiences, I drew a distinction between two notions of belief. On the one hand, beliefs<sub>1</sub> are those mental states which depend on concepts<sub>1</sub>, the latter having more or less stringent conditions of possession. Beliefs<sub>1</sub> stand for common or garden beliefs which cognitive organisms like us own. On the other hand, beliefs<sub>2</sub> rely on concepts<sub>2</sub>, where a subject has a given concept<sub>2</sub> C only if she is capable of systematically discriminating or otherwise behaving towards instances of C in ways she would not towards instances of non-C. In accordance with this criterion of concept-possession, beliefs<sub>2</sub> are fairly rudimentary mental states which may be had not only by normal adults, but also by babies and snails. At this stage, I think one could also claim that beliefs<sub>1</sub> and beliefs<sub>2</sub> constitute different kinds of mental states. How are they different? One clue emerged in the

last section: beliefs<sub>1</sub> are much more cognitively sophisticated than beliefs<sub>2</sub>. Another one came up in this section: unlike states such as beliefs<sub>1</sub>, beliefs<sub>2</sub> are actual whenever a subject instantiates them. Once the two relevant senses of belief are identified and their differences specified a bit further, it becomes manifest that a stative view of perceptual experience need neither over-intellectualize perceptual phenomena nor obscure the fairly intuitive psychological differences between perceptual experiences and ordinary beliefs.

To sum up, I turned here to the thought that an obvious psychological distinction between experiences and beliefs forces us to set both psychological kinds under different ontological categories. In response to this, I suggested that an ontological divide does not necessarily transpire from the psychological one. Granted: while perceptual experiences are always actual, beliefs need not be so. But this does not yet show that these psychological categories fall under different ontological heads: in principle, it could just mean that they constitute different kinds of mental states. Of course, none of what I have said here settles which ontological stance one should prefer, (S) or (P). The latter issue is tackled within the larger scheme of this dissertation, where I intend to show that a processive view of perceptual experiences is not compulsory (chapters 1 and 2), and that there are actually good reasons to endorse a stative view (chapters 3 and 4).

## VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, I have expanded on the notion of mental state relevant to what I called a stative view of perceptual experiences. In a nutshell, the position reads as follows:

(S) Perceptual experiences are mental states.

As explained in chapter 1, my overall goal is to articulate and partially to defend (S). Within this larger context, chapter 2 was devoted to expand on the

stative view already hinted at by Vendler's work.

In the picture I have thereby outlined, perceptual experiences are mental states, where the latter satisfy the following conditions:

- (a) Perceptual states are process-dependent, and are also defined by the functional role they play within the broader psychological and epistemic economy of a subject.
- (b) Perceptual states are instantial (as opposed to internal) states: that is, they pick up on the instantiation of certain informational relations by perceivers and their surroundings; as such, these states do not involve a substantive ontological commitment over and above our commitment to substances, properties, relations, and substances' instantiation of such properties/relations.
- (c) Perceptual states are process-dependent, but need not rely on phenomenally conscious processes. Thus conceived, they also accommodate the temporal transparency of perceptual experiences, the apparent extension of certain objects of perception, and the apparent continuity of perceptual experiences.
- (d) Perceptual states do not collapse into garden or ordinary beliefs: as such, a stative view does not over-intellectualize perceptual phenomena.
- (e) Perceptual states are such that they could accommodate an intuitive divide between perceptual experiences and belief, namely, that perceptual experiences are always actual or manifest to consciousness, whereas beliefs may, but need not, be so. There is no obvious conflict here because perceptual and doxastic states may be *sui generis*.

Much more could be said about the mental states at the heart of (S). The present statement of a stative view focuses on (a)-(e) only because these conditions serve specific purposes throughout this dissertation. The notion of process-dependent perceptual states is intended to show how O'Shaughnessy's 'total mental

'freeze' thought experiment fits within a stative framework (cf. chapter 1.2). More generally, what this notion does for us is to show how one could espouse a stative ontology of perception and, at the same time, acknowledge the dynamic or episodic character of perceptual experiences (cf. chapter 2.1). A description of perceptual states in terms of their functional roles will, meanwhile, be a prominent piece of my case for (S) in chapter 4 (cf. chapter 4.2.2). Conceiving perceptual states as instantial completes a line of thought that cuts across chapters 1 and 2: whereas chapter 1 aimed to show that a processive stance involves a substantive ontological commitment – crucially, committing oneself to believe in the existence of phenomenally conscious processes – (b) is intended to show that a stative view only need to involve a relatively modest ontological commitment. This line of reasoning, in turn, sets up the ground to argue that, once we conceive perceptual experiences as mental states, it is not necessary to postulate phenomenally conscious processes. (c) relates a stative ontology of perception to the phenomenology of perceptual experiences: in particular, it seeks to undermine Soteriou's phenomenological motivation to espouse a version of (S) which heavily relies on phenomenally conscious processes (cf. chapter 1.3). Finally, (d) and (e) address two objections I often meet in conversation: on the one hand, I do not think that perceptual states over-intellectualize perception, for they are not identical to garden or ordinary beliefs; and, on the other, the actuality of perceptual phenomena in the stream of consciousness is not overridden when experiences are conceived along stative lines.

What I have said throughout chapters 1 and 2 does not constitute a positive case for the stative view, of course. Thus far, I have intended to show at most three things: first, that a processive view is by no means compulsory; secondly, that there is an internally coherent formulation of a stative view which does not depend on phenomenally conscious processes; and thirdly, that there is suggestive (but still defeatable) evidence in favour of the thought that a stative view is ontologically more elegant or economic than a processive one. In a way, what I have aimed to show is that, at the level of pure formulation, a stative view is a legitimate alternative to the ontological options advanced by O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou, and Crowther. Now I have to provide persuasive reasons in favour of (S). I take a

modest shot at this task in chapters 3 and 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE IDENTITY OF EXPERIENCES

The present dissertation addresses the ontological question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences. In chapter 1, I distinguished two prominent (albeit not necessarily exhaustive) stances on this issue, namely, a processive and a stative conception. In a slogan, these positions read as follows:

(P) Perceptual experiences are mental processes.

(S) Perceptual experiences are mental states.

As previously anticipated, the goal of this dissertation is to make a case for (S): thus, whereas the previous two chapters were devoted to formulating the stative view, I now proceed to defend it. A natural starting-point is, I think, a discussion of the conditions governing the existence of perceptual experiences – for short, their identity conditions: after all, to the extent that they rely on different ontological categories, (S) and (P) are presumably bound to different accounts of such conditions. In particular, it seems to me that both views should provide different accounts of temporally extended perceptual experiences, for, as I previously mentioned, a key difference between processes and states concerns their diachronic existence – whereas processes occur or take time, states obtain or continue to obtain. That said, the goal of this chapter is two-fold: on the one hand, I challenge (P)'s ability to provide a story of diachronic perceptual experiences; and, on the other, I argue that one of (S)'s virtues precisely consists in delivering such an account. The key problem with a processive account is that it provides no guide for individuating or 'counting' the temporal particulars it ultimately posits. By contrast, since mental states are not (either spatial or temporal) particulars, the stative view would pre-empt similar attempts to individuate or count perceptual experiences.

The present chapter is divided into three main sections. First, I explain why a discussion of experiential individuation should focus on temporally extended experiences and why views like (P) and (S) have a bearing on this issue. Secondly, I argue that (P) poses the question how perceptual experiences are individuated over time, but fails to provide the necessary conceptual resources to settle it. Finally, I show that (S) avoids that difficulty insofar as it does not raise the same question.

## I. EXPERIENTIAL CONTENT AND EXPERIENTIAL VEHICLE

To defend (S), this chapter turns to the identity conditions of perceptual experiences over time. For this reason, I want to do two things in this preliminary section: first, to spell out why temporally extended experiences are so important in



this context; and, secondly, to motivate (S)'s and (P)'s bearing on the individuation of perceptual experiences.

To illustrate the forthcoming remarks, I shall once again rely on the example of a vigilant sailor's visual experiences.

#### Example 1

A sailor on deck, Jim, looks for a star during a cloudy night. At one point, the sky begins clearing up a bit, and our vigilant subject suddenly sees a bright star. Jim sees the star from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , over which time there are no interruptions or conspicuous changes in his visual field, and the relevant star looks or appears a determinate way,  $w$ , to him.

But now I shall also expand on this example along the following lines:

#### Example 2

Jim sees the same bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , but now another sailor, Jack, joins him, stands right next to Jim, and sees the same star. The star looks the same determinate way,  $w$ , to both of them. Alternatively, one could try a trans-world comparison. Imagine a possible world,  $W_2$ , exactly like ours,  $W_1$ , where Jack, not Jim, does exactly the same thing that Jim does in  $W_1$ : in this case, it is natural to suppose that things appear exactly the same way,  $w$ , to Jim and Jack, each one inhabiting different possible worlds.

These cases highlight a number of points. To begin with, both examples remind us of the fact that perceptual experiences primarily play a role within a story of perception or perceptual acts. Thus, when Jim and Jack see a bright star ('seeing' referring here to a temporally protracted experiential occurrence starting

at  $t_1$ ), the notion of visual experience is intended to capture a crucial part of their psychological lives. When a subject  $S$  perceives a certain worldly item  $X$ , and  $X$  appears a certain way to  $S$ ,  $S$  is perceptually aware or has a perceptual experience of  $X$ . There is an intimate conceptual and ontological relationship between experiences and their subjects: as noted by A.J. Ayer, '[i]n the ordinary way, we identify experiences in terms of the persons whose experiences they are' (Ayer 1963, 84; also cf. Peacocke 2012). Again, the notion of perceptual appearance is a significant component in a description of a perceiver's experiential life: what perceptual experiences a subject undergoes depends not only on what informational channels are established between a subject and her surroundings via her sensory systems, but also on how the relevant perceptual information is conveyed. By disregarding how things appear (i.e. look (like), taste (like), etc.) to perceivers at a time or over time, one would under-describe their experiential lives. Jim and Jack will have different visual experiences if they see an item (say, a bright star) which looks different ways to both of them (say, like a bright star to Jim, and like a satellite to Jack). To have the same kind of perceptual experiences, subjects must be affected the same way by the items they perceive. Finally, the second example illustrates the possibility of conceiving different subjects standing in the same relations of perceptual awareness vis-à-vis their surroundings. Thus, I take it that Jack and Jim stand in a similar relation of visual awareness to the bright star: how things look to Jack is identical or very similar to how things look to Jim; Jim and Jack have visual experiences of the same type; or again, there is an intuitive sense of 'seeing' in which Jack sees the same thing that Jim does.

That said, I shall expand now on the importance of temporally extended experiences by stressing the ontological dependence of synchronous perceptual experiences (experiences at a time) on diachronic ones (experiences over time). Although one may uncontroversially distinguish both kinds of experiences, it is important to bear in mind that non-protracted ones exist within a wider temporal context. Like the above examples, descriptions of perceptual experiences in general pick up on temporally protracted phenomena: for, while perceptual acts (that is, achievements like spotting an object) get subjects in informational contact with worldly items at a time, perceptual experiences hold such informational

transactions in existence; that is, perceptual experiences are temporally protracted phenomena because their role is precisely that of reflecting how a subject is perceptually related to her surroundings over an extended period of time. Perceptual experiences are not the kind of items which may exist for a mere instant of time: while Jim may, for example, see (as Vendler puts it, in the 'spotting' sense) a bright star at an instant, he could not visually experience it during a mere instant of time. Indeed, it is possible to have very short-lived experiences of objects and properties: say, a subject may be aware of a flash for half or a quarter of a second. These are, however, not instantaneous experiences: no matter how short-lived they may be, they are temporally protracted.<sup>28</sup> I am tempted to think that, whenever one refers to perceptual experiences at a time, one does not pick up on instantaneous experiential monads, but on a subject at a time at which she undergoes temporally protracted experiences. For example, although it is legitimate to ascribe a visual experience to Jim at  $t_2$ , this amounts to saying that Jim visually experiences worldly items during a period of time  $t_1$ - $t_x$  and that  $t_2$  lies within  $t_1$ - $t_x$ . To generalize this point a bit further, one could convey the dependency of synchronous experiences on diachronic ones as follows:

- (D) A subject  $S$  has a perceptual experience of  $O$  at  $t_2$  only if  $S$  perceptually experiences  $O$  during  $t_1$ - $t_x$  and  $t_2$  is an instant within  $t_1$ - $t_x$ .

This principle is compatible with the existence of statements about perceptual experiences at a time which explicitly fail to refer to a temporally protracted experience: after all, (D) is not a grammatical claim. The point is that, if (D) is true, the analysis of perceptual experiences at a time explicitly or implicitly relies on temporally extended perceptual experiences. This is the sense in which I take synchronous perceptual experiences to depend on diachronic ones.

In spite of our differences, the primacy of temporally extended experiences is a point on which I coincide with O'Shaughnessy. He secures this stance by means of a phenomenological analysis where the relevant psychological

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, this claim would be false if, inspired by Hume, one assumed that there are temporally indivisible experiences or impressions. This position is controversial, though.

phenomena capture a subject's recent past as well as her present: thus, '[a] man staring fixedly at a chair is as directly aware of the perceptual object of a few seconds ago as is the perceiver of a movement across time. The individuation of the perception of any instant requires that it be so.' (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 60) On this view, perceptual experiences are not protracted phenomena developing out of instantaneous or discrete experiences: instead, they are fundamentally or constitutively extended in time. But, in addition to this phenomenological line of reasoning, it is also important to appreciate that O'Shaughnessy's processive stance demands the ontological primacy of diachronic experiences. As noted in chapter 1, he holds that perceptual experiences are processive or occurrent to the core, in the sense that they can only be analysed into process-stages – that is, processes of the same kind. Suppose now that temporally extended experiences should be conceived as bundles of instantaneous or discrete experiences: the latter could not be analysed in processive terms, for processes (even short-lived ones) could not occur at single instants of time; hence, it would turn out that perceptual experiences are not processive to the core, at least in the aforementioned sense. To guarantee his processive analysis of perceptual experiences through and through, O'Shaughnessy has to subordinate synchronous experiences to diachronic ones, not the other way around: that is the only way in which he can plausibly claim that perceptual processes are always constituted by other processes of the same kind.

I do think that the category of temporally extended experiences is more fundamental than that of instantaneous ones. That said, neither this ontological primacy nor (D) necessarily entail a processive stance. If perceptual experiences are conceived as mental states, ascribing them to a subject *S* at a time *t* also presupposes that *t* falls within a period of time during which *S* goes through a temporally extended experience. Indeed, the thought that a subject or an object could instantiate a state (say, a belief, a wish, etc.) for only an instant of time is extremely puzzling. In relation to perceptual phenomena, this feature of stative ascriptions could be accounted for by the fact that experiences are intended to set a subject in informational contact with her surrounding over a given period of time.

Let's take stock. As previously stated, this dissertation examines the question what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences – in other

words, what kind of psychological items they are. That being the case, it should be more or less clear by now why the present discussion should say something about temporally extended experiences: they constitute central cases of the psychological category I am concerned with, and hence, a natural starting-point for this project. Now, even if the foregoing remarks are along the right lines, it is unclear what precise bearing something like (P) or (S) could have on the present subject-matter. This is the second preliminary point I address here.

Among other things, a theory of perceptual experiences should specify how to identify or 'count' perceptual experiences across time: say, if Jim visually experiences a bright star during  $t_1$ - $t_n$ , such an account should be capable of determining how many visual experiences he goes through during that time; or, if the question is misguided, why it is so. I do not argue for this point, but simply take it for granted. What features of temporally extended perceptual experiences would, however, help us to individuate or count them? To address this question, I shall rely on a very general, and hence uncontroversial, distinction between content and vehicle of content: that is, I shall distinguish the things perceptual experiences are *of* or *about* from perceptual experiences themselves. Although the notion of content may be understood in as many ways as the notion of intentionality, I expect it to be clear that the sense in which I talk about it here is not a heavy-duty one: whether ultimately analysed in representational or relational terms, perceptual experiences are intuitively about or of things other than themselves. For example, there is a more or less obvious distinction between Jim's visual experience and what that experience is about, i.e. a bright star: the star is a physical object which existed light-years from Jim and probably died long ago; Jim's visual experience is, in turn, a mental phenomenon which exists in him alone and shares none of the physical properties which a star might have – that is, it has no weight, size, degree of luminosity, etc. Although a visual experience is no physical object, it can be about one. The content-vehicle distinction thus provides a framework to draw a number of similarities and differences: Jim and Jack go through the same kind of psychological phenomenon, namely, perceptual experiences as opposed to remembrances, beliefs, etc.; in addition to this, such experiences are about the same thing, a bright star which looks the same

determinate way to both subjects; again, these experiences stand apart from experiences endowed with different contents – either by concerning different physical items or by presenting the same ones in different ways; and so on.

With this general distinction at hand, the previous question may be rephrased as follows: should the identification of perceptual experiences over time be accounted for in terms of experiential contents or experiential vehicles? In a nutshell, I think the content of perceptual experiences throws no lights on the issue at stake: to settle questions of individuation, it is necessary to address perceptual experiences themselves. This is the reason why (S) and (P) have a bearing on the present discussion: after all, they precisely intend to take a stance on the nature of experiential vehicles. Before diving into my positive position, let me pause on the negative point concerning experiential content.

On the assumption that perceptual experiences may be analysed into experiential content and experiential vehicles, the thought is that their diachronic identity could be fixed by the content which such psychological phenomena have: that is, to specify how many experiences a subject has over time, one only has to determine what and how worldly items are perceptually presented to her over the relevant temporal span. According to this view, what visual experiences Jim and Jack have depends on what items they are visually aware of (e.g. a star, clouds, sea, etc.) and how such objects are presented to them, something which is in turn determined by a complex number of environmental, perspectival, and neurobiological facts. Could one thereby expect experiential content, in this broad sense of the term, to specify what experiences Jim and Jack have throughout a given period of time? I do not think so.

As previously mentioned, perceptual experiences are understood here as relations of awareness between perceivers and their surroundings. If such experiences are temporally protracted, the relevant relations will also be indexed to periods of time. That being the case, a story of experiential individuation is accordingly bound to convey who the relevant perceiver is, what and how environmental items are presented to that subject, and how long the relevant experience lasts. Experiential content, however, precisely fails to capture at least two of those components: even if it captures what items a subject perceives and

how they are presented to her, it is still silent on who the relevant subject is and how much time the relevant experience takes. For example, a description of a visual experience of the kind introduced in example 2 leaves open whether the relevant subject is Jim or Jack. Indeed, an ideal description of the relevant experiential content would incorporate facts about the perceived items and the specific mode of presentation, including perspectival facts determined by the physical location of the subject relative to the perceived scene. But even if such a description established that the relevant experience was had by *some* subject, it would not settle who the exact subject is. In other words, Jim and Jack could have visual experiences with the same content, where identity of content means that they have experiences of the same kind: they may have the same sort of experiences not in spite of the fact that experiential content is silent on the question which subject undergoes the relevant experience, but precisely because of that.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of transparency suggests that experiential contents fail to fix the duration of its corresponding experiential vehicles. Derived from a few esoteric remarks made by G.E. Moore (cf. Moore 1903)<sup>29</sup>, the general thought is that reflection on perceptual experiences is not sensitive to features of the experiences themselves, but only to features of the worldly items our perceptual experiences are of. For example, if I reflect on my current visual experiences, I cannot attend to the very mental phenomena opening the visible world to me, but only to the items I see, e.g. a laptop, a table, a few DVDs, etc. - in this sense, experiences themselves are 'invisible' or 'transparent' to reflection. A bit more specifically, experiential transparency involves two claims: on the positive side, that reflection on perceptual experiences refers to the worldly items such experiences are about; and, on the negative side, that reflection on perceptual experiences refers to nothing more than those items. The positive claim is fairly uncontroversial. And while it may not be immediately obvious why the negative point is correct, I think one could partially secure it on a case-by-case basis: that is, for any given feature of experiential vehicles as opposed to worldly items, one could examine whether an introspective analysis of perceptual experiences latches

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<sup>29</sup> For a statement of the 'transparency' phenomenon which captures much better the point made by contemporary philosophers, cf. Farrell 1950.

onto such a feature. Again, while examples of the transparency phenomenon often concern spatial items, they could also refer to temporal features: on the assumption that experiential content involves a temporal component, one could thus argue that such a component is not a feature of experiential vehicles, but of the scene perceptually presented to a subject. Suppose, for example, that Jim is uninterruptedly aware of a bright star for ten seconds. Let's also assume that these ten seconds are somehow built into the content of Jim's visual experience. Now, even if all of this is the case, transparency poses a threat: for, given the distinction between features presented in experience and features of experiences, one could argue that the aforementioned period of time equivalent to ten seconds is a temporal feature of the scene experienced by Jim from a certain vantage point. So, even if Jim stares at a bright star for ten seconds and the content of his experience also incorporates an interval of ten seconds, the temporal properties specified by such a content are properties of the things presented to Jim, not of anything in Jim's mind.

Michael Tye, I think, presses the negative part of the transparency thought in relation to the experience of temporal features: when we perceive the world or introspect our experiences, 'we are not aware of our experiences as unified or as continuing through time or as succeeding one another' (Tye 2003, 96); instead, the positive thought goes, we are primarily aware of worldly items as unified or as continuing through time. 'Continuity, change, and succession,' temporal features we are perceptually aware of, 'are experienced as features of items experienced, not as features of experiences.' (Tye 2003, 97) These remarks may be naturally reinforced by the vehicle-content distinction. For example, Daniel Dennett stresses that, to the extent that the temporal structure of psychological states or processes may be quite different from that of what they represent, temporal features intervene in experience only as features of what experience presents us with, not features of the experiential vehicles themselves (cf. Dennett 1991, ch. 6). These considerations thereby suggest that, in general, experiential content does not fix the duration of temporally extended experiences, but only that of what is experienced by the relevant subject.

In short, while the content of experiences may specify what type of



experiences subjects have, they would fail to settle what experiences perceivers have during certain periods of time: after all, they do not really fix who undergoes the relevant experience nor how much time they take. This is why one should turn to the relevant experiential vehicles in order to individuate perceptual experiences, at which point (P) and (S) become relevant.

## II. THE INDIVIDUATING ROLE OF PERCEPTUAL PROCESSES

The individuation of temporally extended perceptual experiences cannot rest on experiential content alone: to settle this issue, it is important to understand what kind of psychological items they are. A processive and the stative conception provide different answers to this ontological question: whereas one view models perceptual experiences as mental processes, the other one conceives them as mental states. In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that a prominent virtue of (S) over (P) is precisely its ability to deal with the individuation of temporally extended perceptual experiences. More specifically, this section takes on the negative task of stressing (P)'s inability to handle, first, the very individuation of experiences over time, and, secondly, the relationship between experiences and the worldly items they present to a subject.

Two preliminary remarks are in order, though. First, it is necessary to be clear on what kind of processes are invoked by a processive conception. I previously mentioned that (P) conceives perceptual experiences as processes which, once concluded, come to constitute events – i.e. temporal particulars. Furthermore, the relevant processes are not any given kind of processes, but specifically psychological or mental ones: as such, they are 'internal' at least in the sense that they are not publicly accessible items – for example, you cannot see a visual experience the same way you see a tree or a dog. Secondly, I mentioned in the previous section that the individuation of experiences depends on fixing a number of components related to each token-experience, namely, perceived items, mode of perceptual presentation, experiencing subject, and duration of experience. I shall not be concerned here with the relationship between experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, subjects and modes of presentation. Processes are by

definition things that a subject could do or that may happen to her: as such, there seems to be a metaphysical (or at least conceptual) connection between perceivers and the processes in terms of which (P) defines perceptual experience. Again, I suspect that specifying how things are presented to a subject is a job for experiential contents, not experiential vehicles: that is, how things are presented in experience would, at least ideally, be captured by a description of what your experiences are of, not by a description of what your experiences are.<sup>30</sup> So, the most pressing task for an account of experiential vehicles (e.g. (S) or (P)) is that of throwing some light on the relationship between perceptual experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, the worldly items they are about and time. As just anticipated, my negative goal is to show that a processive view does not appropriately deal with such conceptual connections.

The decisive point against (P), it seems to me, concerns the way in which it deals with the relationship between perceptual experiences and time. The importance of this point should be more or less clear: for, while there is a natural sense in which mental phenomena should not be spatially categorized – a belief or an emotion has no weight, it is not to the left or to the right of a physical object or another propositional attitudes, etc. – they may be temporally qualified (cf. O'Shaughnessy 1971, 2000; Steward 1997). After all, time seems to encompass both the physical and the mental. Since perceptual experiences are temporal items, a story of the conditions under which they exist should say something about their temporal structure. As I take temporally extended experiences to be ontologically primary, the present discussion shall focus on cases where a subject experiences her surroundings for a non-instantaneous period of time.

As suggested by Dennett, the temporal structure of what our experiences are about does not necessarily reflect the temporal structure of the experiences themselves: in other words, the temporal features of experiential vehicles need not transpire in experiential contents (cf. chapter 1.2 and section 1 of this chapter). That being the case, how else could one determine the duration of perceptual experiences? If these psychological items are temporally protracted events

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<sup>30</sup> Compare here Richard Wollheim's remark on describing the subjective character of mental states: 'we give the intentionality of a mental state and anticipate that the subjectivity will convey itself.' (Wollheim 1984, 40)

resulting from the completion of perceptual processes, it would at least be legitimate to ask when they begin and when they end. Although he does not specifically discuss a processive view of experiences, B.A. Farrell highlights the difficulties faced by such questions of temporal individuation:

Surely, that is, we can say that it [i.e. the experience in perception] stands in “temporal relations” to other events or processes? No—this will not do. For to say that “something or other happens quite frequently” is to say that the something occurs at different times. To say this is to say that this something is in principle datable. How now do we set about dating the occurrence that is X's experience at any time? All we can do is to date X's responses. But suppose X, as subject-observer, sets himself the task of dating the onset of a certain raw feel experience, for example, the one that is supposed to happen when he sees two changing shapes as equally elliptical. When X times himself here, say by stopping a stop watch, all that he *can* time in his “seeing”—*e.g.*, his subvocal “Ah! That's it”, his accompanying release of breath and muscular tension, and so forth. What, therefore, he dates is the onset of his seeing the shapes as equally elliptical. Difficulties only multiply if we now retreat and say “But we time the experience indirectly by timing the behaviour that it accompanies?” *E.g.* What sort of “accompanying” does this ghost do? (Farrell 1950, 178)

Farrell's reasoning moves in two stages. First, the thought that perceptual experiences are datable is, he notes, profoundly problematic insofar as it is not possible directly to trace perceptual experiences over time: in principle, one may only track those behavioural inputs and outputs related to the relevant experiential phenomena. Second, he stresses that the relationship between perceptual experiences and their behavioural correlates is quite puzzling: indeed, this is the issue at the heart of the mind-body problem. These remarks thereby suggest that a subject's behavioural responses could hardly constitute a guide into the temporal identification of perceptual experiences. According to Farrell, these psychological phenomena are not the kind of things that can be timed. We can certainly keep track of a subject's behavioural responses and of the things she is perceptually responsive to – whether the relevant subject is *ourselves* or someone else – but the duration of the episodic experience underpinning discriminatory or locomotive behaviour would be bound to remain elusive.

Now, whereas Farrell focuses on a generic experiential notion, I specifically target perceptual experiences conceived as mental (more specifically, phenomenally conscious) processes. Indeed, I do think that the temporal individuation of perceptual experiences is bound to meet the kind of problems

described by Farrell. However, this need not constitute an objection against the notion of perceptual experience in general, for one could still hold that experiences could not and should not be datable; that is, one could argue that it is conceptually misguided to ask question such as 'When did it begin?' of items falling under the relevant experiential notion. Farrell's line of reasoning, I think, presents a difficulty for the mental processes posited by the processive theorist: if perceptual experiences are conceived as events constituted by phenomenally conscious processes, they would have definite temporal boundaries; or, in other words, if perceptual experiences are temporally extended events, there should be a principled answer to questions such as 'When did her experience begin?'. At this stage, the processive theorist might opt for preserving the temporally fuzzy boundaries of perceptual processes, but it is unclear how he could support that claim. A philosophical account of perceptual experiences should be capable of illuminating when such psychological occurrences begin, or, in case that such a question could not be answered, capable of illuminating why the question has no answer. (P), however, provides psychological particulars, the temporal boundaries of which we cannot by definition access, let alone individuate.

Here is another worry about the temporal individuation for perceptual processes: if perceptual experiences are conceived along the lines of (P), it is unclear how many experiences a perceiver is subject to whenever she experiences her surroundings for a non-instantaneous span of time. Say that Jim visually experiences a bright star, uninterruptedly, from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ : if perceptual experiences are temporally extended events resulting from mental processes, one could in principle ask how many visual experiences Jim has between  $t_1$  and  $t_x$ . As far as I can see, there are two lines of reply: first, that our vigilant sailor has one single experience during that period of time; and, secondly, that he actually undergoes a number of experiences – 'how many' being, for the time being, irrelevant. Both options are, I take it, clearly incompatible. That said, my point is not that either alternative is implausible. Instead, the worry is that there is no definitive evidence in favour of either view: for all we know, both positions could be correct. This is, I submit, an unfortunate outcome: was that correct, the temporal individuation of perceptual experiences would turn out to be an arbitrary matter. I expand a bit

further on this line of reasoning next.

A prominent advocate of the 'one-experience' view is Michael Tye: according to him, 'for each period of consciousness, there is only a single experience—an experience that represents everything experienced within the period of consciousness as a whole (the period, that is, between one state of unconsciousness and the next).' (Tye 2003, 97) This view has it that Jim goes through a single visual experience from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ .<sup>31</sup> As previously mentioned, he stresses the phenomenon of perceptual transparency: a bit more specifically, he presses the transparency thought in relation to the spatial as well as temporal features that perceptual experience presents us with. In broad lines, the view comes down to this: just as the spatial items perceptual experience presents us with are not features of experience itself, but features of the experientially presented environment; the temporal features experientially presented to us are not features of our experiences, but features of the perceived world. According to him, the temporal structure of experiential content – that is, the temporal features presented to a perceiver in experience – would not determine the temporal structures of our perceptual experiences (cf. Tye 2003, 98-9). Tye exploits the temporal transparency of experience precisely to defend the one-experience view: given that experiential content provides no guide into the temporal structure of experiential vehicles, the one-experience hypothesis seems to be the best stance on experiential individuation. This line of reasoning is nicely summarized in the following passage:

[t]he one experience hypothesis finds further support in the general difficulty we face in individuating experiences through time. Consider an ordinary visual experience and suppose that it is exclusively visual. When did it begin? When will it end? As I write now, I am sitting in a library. Looking ahead, and holding my line of sight fixed, I can see many books, tables, people in the distance walking across the room, a woman nearby opening some bags as she sits down. Is this a single temporally extended visual experience? If not, why not? (Tye 2003, 98)<sup>32</sup>

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31 In fact, Tye's position is a bit more complex: a subject (Jim, in this case) has a single experience encompassing everything she is perceptually aware of: hence, Jim would not have a single visual experience, but an experiences that encompasses everything he is visually, auditorily, olfactorily aware of, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, however, I ignore this complication here.

32 Tye also comments on the compatibility of his one-experience hypothesis with the linguistic evidence apparently supporting that subjects could have several experiences over time (cf. Tye 2003, 97). This constitutes further evidence that his position answers to concerns about the

When a subject experiences the world during a non-instantaneous span of time, she has only one experience, namely, the event constituted by the whole experiential process between her states of unconsciousness: to repeat, if Jim uninterruptedly sees a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , he has a single experience during that period of time. The target of this rather economical framework for experiential individuation is two-fold: on the one hand, the view that the temporal structure of experiential contents determines that of experiential vehicles; and, on the other, the many-experiences hypothesis or the view according to which perceptual experiences are constituted by shorter mental events. Per transparency, Tye thinks that reflection on perceptual experiences does not provide substantive evidence in favour of either position. The simplest hypothesis is, hence, the one-experience view.

As previously mentioned, the transparency claim seems quite plausible: even if its negative component comes to be contested, I suspect it could be partially vindicated – that is, vindicated in relation to specific features presented in experience. It is, I think, extremely plausible that the temporal features perceptual experiences present us with are features of the perceived scene, not of the experiences themselves. For this reason, I provisionally conclude that Tye makes a persuasive case against his two targets. The bad news is that the same considerations concerning the temporal transparency of experiences set pressure on the one-experience hypothesis: although reflection on perceptual experiences lends little evidence in favour of the many-experiences view, it is unclear why it supports Tye's position; after all, evidence against one position is not necessarily equivalent to evidence in favour of a competing alternative. More importantly, reflection on perceptual experiences does not show that a subject's uninterrupted experiential stream constitutes a single mental event for the same reason it does not show that the same stream breaks into experience-parts, namely, the subject's insensitivity to the temporal features of her own experiences. Tye asks whether a subject's uninterrupted conscious stream is constituted by a single psychological item, and, if it does not, why not: but I think one could in turn ask what evidence

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diachronic identity of experiences.

there is to suppose that the aforementioned experience is a single, temporally extended item. To defend the one-experience hypothesis, Tye does not rely on considerations about experiential content, but on the theoretical economy of that view relative to the many-experiences stance. It is, however, unclear to me why the one-experience stance is in any way more economical: after all, both positions resort to exactly the same type of psychological items; the main difference is purely quantitative – whereas Tye invokes only one mental event in order to account for a single, uninterrupted experiential stream, the many-experiences view invokes a number of such events over time. Granted: the latter position may be problematic, but this does not on its own constitute a positive argument or reason in favour of the one-experience view. When we experience the world or reflect about our experiences, we are only aware of worldly items: we are not aware of our experiences' temporal boundaries; as such, it is not manifest to us whether we undergo one or several experiences throughout an experientially uninterrupted period of time.

A bit more tentatively, the foregoing considerations also suggest a line of criticism against (P)'s ability to accommodate the link between experiences and perceived items. It is natural to conceive the objects of perception as the informational sources of those interactions leading up to the occurrence of perceptual experiences, no matter how difficult it may be to specify the relevant informational-causal links.<sup>33</sup> Thus conceived, the worldly items perceptual experiences are of, are just the informational sources of the perceptual achievements in virtue of which such experiences emerge. I take the claim for granted here: when Jim faces a bright star, he sees a determinate object, the source of the informational transaction (across space and time) leading up to Jim's spotting of the star and the corresponding relation of visual awareness. If perceptual experiences are conceived as mental processes, however, it is unclear to me how they are related to our surroundings. As Farrell pointed out, the evidence usually invoked in order to identify and ascribe perceptual experiences would at best provide indirect access to phenomenally conscious processes: after all, recall that O'Shaughnessy and Soteriou take such processes to transcend the domain of

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<sup>33</sup> For a sophisticated example of an account along those lines, cf. Dretske 1981.

physical processes and states, behavioural responses, and so on. As far as I can see, it is by no means obvious what the connection between phenomenally conscious processes, thus conceived, and the world, is. To address this difficulty, one might perhaps attempt to bridge the relevant gap by means of those informational-causal channels capable of linking physical and mental processes. Such a strategy is, however, problematic: on the one hand, it is not obvious how phenomenally conscious processes could interact with neuro-biological phenomena in a subject's brain; on the other, to the extent that they could interact with processes and states of a subject's brain, the relevant processes would become items of the same neural order – but, as I previously mentioned, perceptual experiences are naturally predicated of subjects rather than brains. These considerations are by no means decisive, but it is unclear to me how a processive theorist could plausibly address them or otherwise specify the link between perceptual experiences and the objects of perception. As such, the latter relationship seems to pose a considerable difficulty for (P).

A processive view thus postulates the existence of mental processes and events whose conditions of individuation over time cannot be sharply specified. The problem is not that we lack answers to questions about the existence of experiences over time: the recalcitrance of the question 'When did that visual experience start?' might be justified, and I do think that perceptual experiences are the sort of psychological items about which it would be misguided to ask 'How many experiences Jim has between  $t_1$  and  $t_x$ ?'. Instead, the problem is that (P) legitimises such questions but offers no means for solving them. In short, I conclude that (P) does not provide adequate resources to understand how perceptual experiences are individuated: on the one hand, it is unclear how the relevant mental processes relate to the objects of perception; and, on the other, the processive view is bound to questions of experiential individuation over time which, at the same time, it is unable to solve.



### III. THE INDIVIDUATING ROLE OF PERCEPTUAL STATES

To the extent that processes and states constitute different ontological categories, it is natural to expect them to have different conditions of individuation. Accordingly, by conceiving perceptual experiences as mental states, (S) might turn out to avoid the aforementioned difficulties faced by (P). This is precisely what I argue for in this section: I hold that, where the notion of mental process fails, that of mental state manages to capture the special relationship between perceptual experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, perceived items and time.

I shall continue assuming that a description of experiential content should ideally take care of how worldly items are presented to a specific subject. Again, mental states are intimately related to their subjects: like properties, relations, and dispositions, states are identified in relation to subjects or objects, this being a point which applies to mental states no less than to physical ones.<sup>34</sup> As far as I can see, there is no way of conceiving (physical or mental) states apart from their subjects: a token of the property of redness is not thought on its own, but as something that obtains in a subject. In other words, the idea of subjectless mental states cannot be taken seriously. As such, the numerical identity or difference of token-states crucially depends on what subject instantiates the relevant states. For example, Jim and Jack have different experiences even if the same worldly items are presented in exactly the same way to both of them – that is, even if they may have experiences of the same type: since what it means to be an experiential state depends on what subject has that state, and since Jim is numerically different from Jack, it follows that Jim's experience is not numerically identical to that of Jack's.

That said, I think (S) is capable of capturing the close relationship between experiences and the items they are about. Conceived along stative lines, perceptual experiences obtain in perceivers (not their sub-personal parts), result from the interaction between those subjects and their surroundings, and dispose their subjects to behave in a complex number of ways. What this partially means is that one could not individuate a given perceptual state unless one could latch onto its

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<sup>34</sup> For an elaboration of the ascriptive relationship between states and properties, on the one hand, and, on the other, subjects, cf. Shoemaker 1979; 1980.

subject, environmental input, and (at least partially) behavioural output. Indeed, these three components are constitutive of the relevant state. Within this framework, it is thereby clear how perceptual experiences relate to the worldly items they are about: if these psychological items are mental states, the items they present a subject with are simply constitutive elements in their definition. While it is unclear how mental processes relate to items in physical space, certain mental states are by definition related to them, for they are simply conditions resulting from the interaction between a subject and certain objects and properties in her surroundings. If perceptual experiences are conceived along those lines – that is, as states resulting from the causal-informational interaction between a perceiver and her environs – one should accordingly conclude that there is a deep relationship between them and the items they are about. A stative conception binds experiences to their respective objects because the worldly items presented in experience are effectively constitutive of perceptual states.

More importantly, (S) could also deal with the question how perceptual experiences relate to time. The tension behind this delicate relationship may be expressed as follows: although psychological phenomena exist in time, it is unclear how perceptual experiences should be temporally individuated. As previously explained, (P) legitimises a number of questions about temporal individuation (e.g. 'When did that experience begin?', 'Does Jim have one or many experiences between  $t_1$  and  $t_x$ ?'), but it is incapable of settling them. (S) deals with them differently. To begin with, it is capable of specifying when perceptual experiences begin. But, in addition to that, it pre-empts the emergence of cardinality questions – although perceptual states exist across the temporal dimension, they simply cannot be individuated like processes or tokens of other ontological categories. It is, I think, more or less uncontroversial that physical as well as mental states persist: an object may be red or yellow for a number of days; I may be anxious for two weeks before my exams, or have a headache for a whole afternoon; and so on. But, at the same time, it would be conceptually misguided to track states over time the same way we track the mental processes which go on to constitute processive mental events. In the present context, the importance of states lies in the fact that they belong to a family of items (including properties, dispositions, among others)

which satisfy conditions of existence without being particulars, whether spatial or temporal ones: that is, states do not have the same conditions of identity as material substances and events. Conceived as states, perceptual experiences are thereby redefined in a way that makes certain questions about their identity legitimate, and others, illegitimate. According to (S), experiences have identity conditions, but the latter are not the same sort of conditions that spatial or temporal particulars (that is, material objects or events) have. More specifically, if perceptual experiences are mental states, it would be possible to specify (i) when perceptual experiences begin and end, and (ii), why attempts to count temporally extended experiences are bound to fail.

In relation to (i), Farrell pressed the impossibility of directly accessing, and thereby dating, perceptual experiences. This point is, I think, legitimate when experiences are conceived as mental processes, for the latter are neither observable nor accessible through introspection. By contrast, the same difficulty does not arise when the same psychological items are modelled along the lines of (S): after all, if perceptual experiences are states, their key constitutive elements are directly accessible to philosophical analysis. To illustrate this point, let's return to the example I have been using thus far. Jim sees a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ : spotting the star and losing sight of it are achievements which occur at determinate instants of time. As I previously said, perceptual achievements and perceptual experiences are not identical: the instantaneous event of spotting a star is not an experience. Spotting the star should be conceived as an instantaneous event thanks to which Jim comes to be in a given mental condition from  $t_1$  onwards: he stands in this state for as long as the informational channel between him and the star exists; again, he will be behaviourally responsive vis-à-vis the relevant informational source for as long as he stands in such a state. According to (S), the aforementioned state is constituted by a relation of awareness between Jim and the star. Spotting the star is not the same thing as experiencing the star at  $t_1$ : it only refers to the act of beginning to experience the bright object.

Let's turn to the cardinality question now. Jim visually experiences a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ . How many visual experiences has he? One or many? I previously argued that (P) legitimises and, at the same time, fails to settle this question in

relation to those events constituted by phenomenally conscious processes. The problem is not that the question lacks an answer: after all, I think that perceptual experiences are not the kind of psychological items which may be counted. Instead, the difficulty is that the processive account throws no light on why it is misguided to attempt to solve the relevant question: it just burdens us with extremely controversial entities insofar as their conditions of identity cannot be directly addressed, let alone specified. (S), by contrast, has a tactical advantage: not relying on the existence of mental processes, it explains why perceptual experiences cannot be counted. The reason is actually quite simple: states are not the kind of things which allow for questions of cardinality over time. Unlike substances and events, states instantiated throughout a period of time cannot be counted: that is, given an item instantiating a state of a certain kind from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , it would be mistaken to ask how many tokens of that state the relevant item instantiates throughout  $t_1$ - $t_x$ . States belongs to a family of non-countable categories which also includes properties, dispositions, and masses: by posing the cardinality question, one thereby ignores a fundamental conceptual difference between this cluster of notions and the one including concepts like substance and event.<sup>35</sup> It would not be merely unconventional, but conceptually misguided to ask, for example, how many instances of *being-yellowness* obtain in a banana throughout the time it is ripe. This sort of question would betray a confusion about what it means for something to be in a certain state, e.g. having a certain colour. If perceptual experiences are conceived as mental states, it would thereby not be necessary to determine whether a subject has one or many of them across a given period of time: experiences would not be the kind of things which may be counted; accordingly, one could not pose the cardinality question in the present context. (S) does not take a stance between the one-experience and the many-experiences hypothesis, for it refuses to acknowledge the question those views attempt to address. This framework thus provides the necessary resources to understand why perceptual

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35 Compare here Anthony Kenny's remarks about ways in which dispositions (like states, non-particulars) may be reified or hypostatized: 'In one of Andersen's fairy-tales the goblin takes the housewife's gift of the gab and gives it to the water-butt. To think of a disposition as a piece of property which may be passed from owner to owner is one way of hypostatizing it. Another way, by contrast, is to think of a particular disposition as the kind of thing somebody might have two of, to ask questions such as how many senses of humour Oliver Cromwell had.' (Kenny 1989, 72)

experiences exist in time, but do not submit to certain questions of temporal individuation.

For a similar reason, a stative conception of experience is not committed to the 'snapshot' view of perception. In broad lines, the latter position holds that, if a subject *S* stands in a relation of perceptual awareness with her surroundings during a given period of time, she instantiates numerically distinct states at different moments or sub-intervals throughout that period. So, if Jim visually experiences a star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , the snapshot view argues that he instantiates a perceptual state at  $t_2$  (that is, taking  $t_1$  to be the instant at which he began experiencing the star), another one at  $t_3$ , another one at  $t_4$ , and so on up to  $t_x$ . This view, endorsed even by Armstrong himself (cf. Armstrong 1968), multiplies the mental processes underpinning perceptual phenomena. And, for one reason or another, this bit of a stative conception has been regarded as unappealing. Although it is unclear to me why the snapshot view is incorrect, what one should do here is to highlight the ontological significance of mental states as opposed to categories of countable items: if perceptual experiences are states, they cannot be counted across time; for exactly the same reason, it is mistaken to analyse temporally extended perceptual experiences into temporally discrete states following each other across time. In the present context, it should be clear that the snapshot view is just a specific version of a general conception according to which experiences should answer questions of cardinality. The best antidote against this line of reasoning is, I think, to insist on the ontological differences between states and spatial or temporal particulars.

To sum up, I think that (S) does a better job than (P) when it comes to individuate perceptual experiences over time: more specifically, I argued that a stative conception neatly deals with the relationship between perceptual experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, perceived objects and time. The worldly items presented in experience are effectively constitutive of perceptual states: as such, a stative conception ties experiences to their respective objects. Again, (S) addresses at least two questions concerning the temporal individuation of experiences: first, when they begin; and, secondly, whether they can be counted. If the stative view is correct, both problems can be disposed insofar as mental

states have clear temporal boundaries (that is, starting-points and end-points) but, at the same time, cannot be counted over time. In relation to all these issues, I think (S) fares much better than (P). Accordingly, the previous considerations constitute a partial reason to favour the stative view over a processive one.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Whereas the previous two chapters were mainly concerned with formulating a stative conception of perceptual experiences, this one aimed to defend it. In particular, I argued that (S) provides an elegant framework, first, to get a grip on the way in which perceptual experiences relate to their objects, and, secondly, to understand the delicate relationship between experience and time. I broke this task into three parts. First, I focused on temporally extended experiences and explained why their contents throw little light on them. Secondly, I argued that a processive view does not fare well with the identification of experiences over time. And then, in the final section, I turned to (S) in order to show how it deals with the problems faced by (P) in a more elegant way.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ASSERTIVE CHARACTER OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

What kind of items are perceptual experiences? That is, what do we talk about when we talk about such psychological items? In previous chapters, I have discussed two possible replies to this ontological question, namely, a stative and a processive view:

(P) Perceptual experiences are mental processes.

(S) Perceptual experiences are mental states.

The goal of this dissertation is to make a modest case for (S). Within this context, chapter 3 argued that the question how temporally extended perceptual experiences are individuated is best accommodated by a stative conception of experiences than a processive one. This is one positive reason to endorse (S). The other reason I shall discuss here concerns what may be called the assertive character of perceptual experiences. By assertive character, I mean an essential feature of perceptual experiences in virtue of which the worldly items or states of affairs perceptual experiences present their subjects with, are presented as actual (not as merely possible) items or states of affairs. A bit more specifically, the thought could be expressed either in terms of experiential contents or in terms of experiential subjects<sup>36</sup>: on the one hand, experiences are assertive insofar as the worldly items or states of affairs they present to a subject are presented as being the case; or, on the other, experiences are assertive insofar as their subjects do not passively entertain, but are actually committed to the existence of the worldly items or states of affairs such experiences present them with. That said, this chapter's goal is to show that a stative conception does a better job than a processive account at accommodating the relevant feature.

Why to focus on assertive character? Why not pick up on any other interesting albeit puzzling feature of perceptual experiences instead? Time constraints are naturally part of the answer. But, apart from that, it is important to note that my choice is far from arbitrary in the present context. To unpack a stative conception, this dissertation has strongly relied on a comparison between perceptual experiences and beliefs. For example, I have borrowed much from Armstrong's and Pitcher's theories of perception, the purpose of which is precisely to highlight the similarities between both psychological categories. Given this general structure, it is natural to discuss the notion of assertive character at this point, for, as I shall explain in a moment, it constitutes a commonality between perceptual experiences and beliefs. In line with my overall direction of exposition, the thrust of this chapter is that bearing in mind the paradigmatically stative category of belief throws light on the ontological significance of conceiving

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36 For the distinction between experiential content and experiential vehicle, cf. chapter 3.2.



perceptual experiences as mental states.

This chapter is structured into three parts. First, I introduce the notion of assertive character: to begin with, I frame it in relation to perceptual experiences, beliefs, among other psychological categories; and then, I relate it to the phenomenological notion of perceptual immediacy. Secondly, I turn to the question how the assertive character of perceptual experiences should be understood: relying on the aforementioned connection between perception and belief, I argue that it is extremely plausible to think of it in terms of the functional role which perceptual experiences have within a larger psychological and epistemological economy. This discussion is crucial, for my defence of (S) depends on a specific understanding of assertive character. Finally, I argue that a stative conception of perceptual experiences accommodates the feature of assertive character in a neater way than a processive view.

#### I. ASSERTIVE CHARACTER AND PERCEPTUAL IMMEDIACY

As just anticipated, the goal of this section is to introduce assertive character by relating it, on the one hand, to a number of psychological categories, and, on the other, to the notion of perceptual immediacy. Once again, I shall keep the discussion focused on the visual modality (i.e. on seeing and visual experiences). Accordingly, I shall continue using the example of Jim the sailor. A sailor on deck, Jim, looks for a star during a cloudy night. At one point, the sky begins clearing up a bit, and our vigilant subject suddenly spots a bright star. Jim sees the star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , over which time there are no interruptions or conspicuous changes in his visual field and the relevant star looks or appears a determinate way,  $w$ , to him. With these preliminary points out of the way, I turn to the notion of assertive character.

To begin with, one may throw light on the sense in which perceptual experiences are assertive by stressing commonalities as well as contrasts between different psychological categories. This strategy is not, I think, by any means peculiar. As illustrated by the writings of Armstrong, Pitcher, among many others,

the philosophical study of psychological categories and phenomena often takes off from comparisons rather than a priori definitions. To illuminate the nature of seeing, for example, philosophers usually describe some of the similarities and differences between this perceptual phenomenon and other perceptual or non-perceptual events (e.g. smelling, hearing, judging, thinking, etc.). Again, our understanding of perceptual experiences tends to be enriched, or at least stimulated, by comparing circumstances where we undergo perceptual experiences with circumstances where we fail to do so (e.g. blindness) or ones where some features of perceptual experiences are present but others are absent (e.g. blindsight, super-blindsight, among others). That said, it is natural to draw a comparison between perceptual experiences and beliefs, for they stand apart from other psychological categories in relation to the way in which they convey the world to their subjects. When a subject *S* believes that *p* or experiences a given state of affairs *X*, the worldly items *p* and *X* are about are presented to *S* as if they were actual, not merely possible, items: that is, *S* takes the proposition her belief ranges over to be true; or, likewise, the states of affairs experientially unveiled to her seem to be the case. In this respect, perceptual experiences and beliefs stand apart from propositional attitudes such as thinking, desiring, and hoping: when these attitudes present a subject with worldly items via propositions, the relevant subject need not take such propositions to be true; in fact, some of such propositional attitudes (e.g. desiring) may presuppose that the relevant subject does not believe that *p* is true. For example, Jim may have spotted a bright star, after which he experiences the luminous object and acquires beliefs the content of which he may express as 'That is a bright star', 'There is a star at the distance', 'Lo and behold, a star!', etc. Before *t*<sub>1</sub>, Jim could only relate to that object by looking for it, hoping to spot it, imagining a bright star to be roughly where he expects to find it, etc. An important difference between the mental phenomena Jim goes through before *t*<sub>1</sub> and those he goes through from *t*<sub>1</sub> onwards is that, unlike his hopes and desires, Jim's visual experiences and beliefs present or represent a bright star as something actually present in Jim's environs. Unlike hopes and desires, beliefs and experiences assert the existence of the items they present or represent.

Even though its formulation may vary a great deal from case to case, the

notion of assertive character is commonly approached in the philosophical literature as a respect of similarity between perceptual experiences and beliefs. Richard Heck explicitly pursues this strategy:

Perception is not belief. But no one, so far as I know, has ever been so much as *tempted* to say that perceptions are desires, intentions, or entertainings; only beliefs are liable to be confused with perceptions. The reason is that, as different as perception may be from belief—as isolated in certain ways as perceptual experience is from the influence of our beliefs—there is yet something similar: Both purport *to represent how the world is*; both, we might say (borrowing some terminology from the philosophy of language) have assertoric force. Even when the world appears to be a way I know it not to be—when a stick I know to be straight looks to be bent when I partially immerse it in water (to use a tired example)—it still *looks as if the stick is bent*. That is to say, my experience represents the world as containing a bent stick: In a different way, to be sure, than my beliefs would were I to believe that the stick was bent, but it represents it as being that way nonetheless. (Heck 2000, 508)

A similar thought is in the offing when M.G.F. Martin describes an intentional (i.e. representational) account of perceptual experiences using a distinction between what he calls stative and semantic content. On a stative conception, 'for something to be representational is for it to put something forward as the case or to take it to be so, or to be apt for either role.' (Martin 2002, 386) In this sense of representation, beliefs, judgements and assertoric statements are representational; hopes, desires, and interrogative claims, are not. If a given mental attitude has stative content in Martin's sense, it will represent states of affairs as worldly items which actually obtain: 'In believing or accepting something I am thereby taking it to be so, and in asserting something I am putting it forward as so. In contrast, in merely entertaining the proposition, or hoping that it should be so, I am not thereby taking it to be so, and in making a request I am not putting something forward as so.' (Martin 2002, 386-7) On a semantic conception of content, meanwhile, everything that is about something other than itself is representational: in this sense, hopes, desires, and interrogative claims are indeed representational. With this distinction at hand, Martin argues that the intentionalist view of experience should exploit a stative, not a semantic, understanding of content: for, like Heck, he assumes that there is a commonality between the ways in which experiences present and beliefs represent the world, that is, one which sets them aside from other propositional attitudes; but, by

conceiving perceptual content along semantic lines, one would assimilate the ways in which perceptual experiences and propositional attitudes like hopes and desires represent the world, and hence, obscure the aforementioned commonality between experiences and beliefs. Finally, Katherine Glüer recently stressed the same psychological similarity when claiming that perceptual experiences are strongly representational: according to her, '[e]xperience not only has representational content, it represents the world *as being a certain way*.' (Glüer 2009, 306) Like Heck and Martin, she argues that this is a respect in which experiences resemble beliefs, but one in which they stand apart from 'desires, imaginings, assumings, and entertainings' (Glüer 2009, 307).

Perceptual experiences and beliefs thereby fail to present or represent the world the same way propositional attitudes like hopes and desires do: in this particular respect, experiences and beliefs jointly stand apart from other psychological phenomena. As previously mentioned, this thought may be expressed in a number of ways. My initial choice of words was: the worldly items and states of affairs presented or represented in experience and belief are presented or represented as actual, not merely possible, items. This is just one way of saying that, if S experiences a given state of affairs, her experience purports to present her with that state of affairs or that state of affairs seems to be the case; or again, if she believes that *p*, she takes *p* to be true. To make the same point, it is not necessary to focus on the way in which experiences and beliefs convey the world to a subject. Indeed, one could formulate the same idea by stressing the way in which subjects relate to the worldly items and states of affairs (re)presented in experience and belief. Whereas some propositional attitudes may be such that their respective subjects remain neutral in relation to whether the (re)presented items exist or fail to do so, perceptual experiences and beliefs commit their corresponding subjects to take the world to be the way it is (re)presented to them. A subject may desire or hope there to be a bright star in a certain area of the sky, but none of these instantiated attitudes implies, as far as the respective subject is concerned, that there is actually a star at the distance. Imagining, hoping, and wishing are thereby different from experiencing and believing, for an essential trait of the latter categories is that they commit their subjects to take the existence

of the (re)presented items for granted.

But even if the notion of assertive character is intelligible, is it an essential trait of perceptual experiences and beliefs? Although the point is not entirely uncontroversial, I think there are intuitive reasons to think so. After all, could we actually conceive a belief in  $p$  the subject of which does not take  $p$  to be true, or an experience of a given state of affairs  $X$  which does not impress the apparent existence of  $X$  to its corresponding subject? That is, could we conceive beliefs and experiences which are not assertive? I do not think so. Moore's paradox more or less settled the issue in relation to beliefs: a subject cannot take herself to believe that  $p$  and simultaneously think that  $p$  is false (cf. Wittgenstein 1953, II.x). Although there is not a similar paradox for perceptual experiences, they are also essentially assertive. To appreciate this, one has to consider whether a subject could undergo a perceptual experience of certain worldly items or states of affairs  $X$  but, at the same time, take a passive stance on the experientially presented items – as it were, simply entertain things rather than take them to be so. In relation to this possibility, the phenomenon of vision-recovery after prolonged blindness is specially pertinent (cf. von Senden 1960; Sacks 1995; Ostrovsky et al. 2006). The related findings are, I think, relevant for philosophical purposes because they highlight the role which perceptual experiences play within our psychological and epistemic economy. There are certain forms of blindness where the relevant impairment is reversible. In one of such cases, victims of severe cataracts have undergone surgical procedures which re-establish their visual capacities: before the relevant procedure, many of the relevant subjects were practically blind or enjoyed only degraded visual experiences; thanks to this procedure, the same subjects recover the capacity of processing visual information and, some qualifications aside, become sensitive to their visible surroundings. In the path towards recovery, however, there is a trying stage throughout which these subjects must, as it were, learn to see again. A relatively common result of the aforementioned surgical procedure is that, although the relevant subjects may regain the ability to fix on visual stimuli, they may ignore or take a completely passive stance vis-à-vis that information. If there are such things as non-assertive perceptual experiences, the psychological phenomena emerging in such scenarios come as close as possible to

fit the bill: that is, they might be naturally described as cases where a determinate subject undergoes a visual experience, but the worldly items thereby presented to her would not be presented as actual items.

But should we actually describe the psychological phenomena involved in these cases as perceptual experiences? I do not think so. While perceptual experiences endow a subject with the capacity to behave in a complex number of ways, it seems reasonable to argue that newly sighted subjects fail to experience the world because they fail to engage in such complex patterns of behaviour whenever they 'see' a worldly item.<sup>37</sup> Even if a newly sighted subject is capable of latching onto visible items, she fails to track them over time, translating the acquired information into propositional content for its use in thought and language, etc. – all these being possibilities which should be open to her as she undergoes visual experiences. Thus, if the previous cases of neglectful perception are the best candidates of non-assertive perceptual experiences, as I think they are, and they cannot truly be classified as perceptual experiences, one should thereby conclude that assertive character is an essential or non-negotiable feature of perceptual experiences.

The foregoing remarks intend to establish two things: first, that perceptual experiences are assertive, the latter being a feature which such experiences share with beliefs; and, secondly, that assertive character is an essential feature of both psychological categories. Now, before turning to the notion of perceptual immediacy, a few points of clarification are in order. First, I am not assuming here that perceptual experiences and beliefs are the only assertive categories. For example, if somato-sensory experiences (e.g. pain-experiences) have content in the sense that they present a subject with occurrences in bodily parts or regions, I suspect they would probably count as assertive. In the present discussion, I only examine perceptual experiences and beliefs in order to focus the discussion: by doing so, I do not intend to rule out that other psychological categories might also

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<sup>37</sup> Along these lines, von Senden describes a *stage of purely visual sensation* as one where 'vision is confined to the purely physiological process of the reception and conveyance of stimuli to the visual centres. For the individual, it remains a quite passive influx of visual impressions, which do nothing, as yet, to induce him to emerge from his passive state and to try, for his own part, to take up some sort of mental attitude towards the chaos of colours presented to him.' (von Senden 1960, 129-30)

share the relevant feature.

Secondly, the terminology used here is not intended to suggest that I am willing to ascribe linguistic features to our mental lives. Indeed, while I claim that perceptual experiences and beliefs are assertive, the latter property is primarily derived from the theory of speech acts. That is, the notion of assertive character has its philosophical roots in the idea that statements, not psychological processes or states, have assertive force. Now, by using this piece of linguistic philosophy, I do not intend to assimilate perceptual experiences or other mental phenomena to speech acts: that is, I am not claiming that perceptual experiences are assertive in exactly the same sense in which speech acts are so. The present extrapolation from the philosophy of language only constitutes a useful analogy.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, when I hold that perceptual experiences and beliefs are assertive, this does not mean that they are factive. In a nutshell, being factive may be described as follows: a factive propositional attitude is such that, if a given subject instantiates that attitude in relation to a proposition *p*, then *p* is true; correspondingly, a factive non-propositional attitude is such that, if a given subject instantiates that attitude in relation to a worldly item or state of affairs *X*, then *X* is the case. Knowledge is a standard example of factive propositional attitudes: if you know that  $2+2=4$ , then it is true that  $2+2=4$ . If pain experiences have content in the minimal sense I have previously stipulated and are not propositional, it would be natural to categorize them as factive: if you experience a pain, there is a pain. That said, claiming that perceptual experiences and beliefs are assertive does not entail that they are factive. Indeed, I do not think they are. Committed idealists aside, one would not argue that our perceptual experiences always present things as they really are: as the possibility of perceptual illusions and hallucinations

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38 Compare here Searle's characterization of visual content as propositional: "The content of the visual experience, like the content of the belief, is always equivalent to a whole proposition. Visual experience is never simply *of* an object but rather it must always be *that* such and such is the case. Whenever, for example, my visual experience is of a station wagon it must also be an experience, part of whose content is, for example, that there is a station wagon in front of me. When I say that the content of the visual experience is equivalent to a whole proposition I do not mean that it is linguistic but rather that the content requires the existence of a whole state of affairs if it is to be satisfied." (Searle 1983, 40) He runs the same sort of qualification in relation to the self-referential character of perceptual content: "The sense then in which the visual Intentional content is self-referential is not that it contains a verbal or other representation of itself: it certainly performs no speech act of reference to itself!" (Searle 1983, 49)

makes perfectly clear, how things appear to us may fail to match how things actually are. A straight stick partially submerged into water may look bent when I see it: I perceive an object, but I take it to have a property which it actually lacks. In the much-used example of visual hallucination, Macbeth seems to see a bloody dagger suspended in mid-air: in fact, there is nothing but thin air in front of him. Much in the same way as perceptual experiences may be accurate and inaccurate, beliefs may be true or false. Now, although perceptual experiences and beliefs may be accurate or inaccurate, true or false, they are always assertive. Even if Jim undergoes an illusion or an hallucination concerning the star he is looking for – that is, even if the object apparently presented to him in experience does not exist at all – it will appear to him as if there is actually a bright star in the sky. Again, although a subject may have false beliefs, she cannot hold beliefs she knows to be false.

Before moving on, let me say something about the relationship between assertive character and perceptual immediacy: for, although both notions are closely related, this link is a rather delicate one. In the philosophical literature, it is fairly natural to claim that perceptual experiences are immediate or direct in the sense that, whether accurate or inaccurate, they make their respective subjects immediately or directly aware of the items they are of. Perceptual experiences are supposed to stand out in the theatre of our psychological lives because they endow us with a special form of access into the world: while Jim's visual experience would genuinely present him with the star, other (non-perceptual) phenomena could only represent or provide otherwise mediated forms of access to the same worldly item. Whatever the exact sense in which perceptual experiences are immediate or direct may be, it is closely related to the possibility of acquiring demonstrative (as opposed to descriptive) knowledge about worldly items. For example, part of what it means to say that Jim has direct access to a star when he is visually aware of it, is that, unlike a subject who fails experiencing the same item, he is in a position to form beliefs such as 'That is bright' or 'That is thus'.<sup>39</sup> For the time being, the important point is that, for all the difficulties behind its exact nature, perceptual immediacy is often regarded by philosophers as an obvious feature of how

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<sup>39</sup> For discussion about the relationship between perceptual immediacy and demonstrative knowledge, cf. Snowdon 1992 and Campbell 2002.



perceptual experiences convey the world to us – in other words, as a basic datum of our perceptual phenomenology (cf. Sturgeon 2000, ch. 1).

In their respective writings, John Searle and Scott Sturgeon neatly express the previous line of thought:

If, for example, I see a yellow station wagon in front of me, the experience I have is directly of the object. It doesn't just "represent" the object, it provides direct access to it. The experience has a kind of directness, immediacy and involuntariness which is not shared by a belief I might have about the object in its absence. It seems therefore unnatural to describe visual experiences as representations, indeed if we talk that way it is almost bound to lead to the representative theory of perception. Rather, because of the special features of perceptual experiences I propose to call them "presentations". The visual experience I will say does not just represent the state of affairs perceived; rather, when satisfied, it gives us direct access to it, and in that sense it is a presentation of that state of affairs. (Searle 1983, 45-6)

[...] your visual experience will place a moving rock before the mind in a uniquely vivid way. Its phenomenology will be as if a scene is made manifest to you. This is the most striking aspect of visual consciousness. It's the signal feature of visual phenomenology. And there's nothing ineffable about it. Such phenomenology involves a uniquely vivid directedness upon the world. Visual phenomenology makes it for a subject as if a scene is simply presented. Veridical perception, illusion and hallucination seem to place objects and their features directly before the mind. (Sturgeon 2000, 9; also cf. Crane 2005/2011, s. 2.1.2)

As previously mentioned, the idea cutting across these texts is that perceptual experiences present us with worldly items in a very distinctive way: when we perceive the world, we are not as it were presented with copies of our surroundings, but with the things themselves. Assertive character and perceptual immediacy thus share a general commonality: they constitute distinctive features – that is, necessary but not sufficient conditions – of perceptual experiences. In short, assertive character and immediacy are essential or non-negotiable aspects of perceptual experiences.

That said, it is also important to appreciate a key difference between the aforementioned notions. The main clue is, I think, provided by the phenomenological character of perceptual immediacy. As previously mentioned, the notion of immediacy is supposed to constitute a basic datum about perceptual phenomenology, not a piece of philosophical theorizing. The notion of assertive character, in turn, has no such connotations: in principle, it would be possible to

specify this feature in purely functional terms, or at least in terms which make no reference to how worldly items perceptually appear to a subject. The significance of this difference fully stands out when one bears in mind the comparison between perceptual experiences and beliefs. As previously explained, the notion of assertive character was intended to pick up on a commonality between both psychological categories: this is at least how philosophers commonly approach the notion. By contrast, immediacy is intended to set experiences apart from beliefs: for Searle, beliefs do not present the world to a subject in an immediate or direct way (cf. Searle 1983, 45). Indeed, there is an intuitive sense in which experiences and beliefs present the same worldly items in different ways to their subjects: the direct way in which perceptual experiences present us the world is simply not the same way in which beliefs, among other propositional attitudes, do so. This important asymmetry thereby suggests that the relationship between assertive character and immediacy is far from straightforward.

How should we understand the relationship between the assertive character and the immediacy of perceptual experiences? A fairly natural (if not uncontroversial) suggestion is that, while perceptual experiences present certain things as being the case, the specific way in which they do so is by presenting a subject with the world in an immediate or direct way. That is, while assertive character is a feature in virtue of which worldly items are experientially and doxastically presented to a subject as actual, not merely possible, items, it also seems natural to conceive perceptual immediacy as the specific way in which perceptual experiences pull that off. The background thought is that, although perceptual experiences and beliefs are assertive, it does not follow from this that they are assertive in the same way.<sup>40</sup> Even if both psychological categories constitute forms of mental states, their tokens are obviously different in other respects: as such, it would be by no means surprising that the general or

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<sup>40</sup> This line of thought is hinted at by Heck: 'Even when the world appears to be a way I know it not to be—when a stick I know to be straight looks to be bent when I partially immerse it in water (to use a tired example)—it still *looks as if the stick is bent*. That is to say, my experience represents the world as containing a bent stick: In a different way, to be sure, than my beliefs would were I to believe that the stick was bent, but it represents it as being that way nonetheless.' (Heck 2000, 508) By claiming that experiences and beliefs present us with certain states of affairs as being the case, one need not hold that the way they do so is the same. For all we know, assertive character may pick up on a determinable, not a determinate commonality between the relevant psychological categories.

determinable features they share were implemented or determined in different ways. If functional features of perceptual experiences had an impact on perceptual phenomenology, it is reasonable to expect that the same feature could not have phenomenological consequences when implemented by beliefs, since the latter lack phenomenology, or at least the sort of phenomenology which perceptual experiences have. On the basis of these remarks, it seems coherent to conceive perceptual immediacy as the phenomenological specification of assertive character among perceptual experiences.

To sum up, this section focused on introducing the notion of assertive character as a commonality between perceptual experiences and beliefs, that is, as a feature in virtue of which experiences and beliefs present or represent worldly items as actual, not merely possible, items to their respective subjects. After pausing on a few points of clarification, I related the notion of assertive character to that of perceptual immediacy, since they are closely related. The connection is not straightforward, for both notions play different roles: while assertive character ties perceptual experience and belief together, perceptual immediacy sets them apart. The latter feature may, I suspect, be understood as the specific or determinate way in which perceptual experiences are assertive. Having said that, even if this section has managed to latch onto the notion of assertive character and to outline what it does for us – namely, to present worldly items in a distinctive way to subjects of thought and experience – it has not quite settled how it is exactly implemented in experiences and beliefs. I take on this task next: as previously announced, the story I shall deliver provides the basis for another motivation to endorse (S) over (P).

## II. ASSERTIVE CHARACTER AND FUNCTIONAL ROLE

Assertive character is that feature in virtue of which perceptual experiences and beliefs present us with worldly items or states of affairs as actual, not merely possible, items or states of affairs. Now, although this description specifies what assertive character does for us, it does not spell out how experiences and beliefs

exactly implement that feature. Heck, for example, describes perceptual experiences and beliefs as assertive, but he also acknowledges our limited understanding of the property thus ascribed:

Of course, it would be nice to know more about what it means to say that perceptual states are “assertive.” Unfortunately, I do not know how to explain this. Nor, however, do I know how to explain what is involved in a *belief’s* being assertive: What exactly *does* it mean to say that beliefs purport to represent how the world is? I think an answer to this question could be converted into an answer for the case of perception, too: At least, that is the point of my relying upon this analogy here. (Heck 2000, 509n.29)

Two ideas stand out here: first, that it is by no means obvious what assertive character amounts to; and, secondly, that a story of such a feature should be applicable to experiences as well as to beliefs – this constraint is indeed determined by our general understanding of the relevant notion as a commonality between both psychological categories. This section aims to outline a plausible account of what it exactly means for perceptual experiences to be assertive and, relatedly, immediate. In particular, I argue that the relevant notions may simply pick up on the functional roles of perceptual experiences within our psychological and epistemic economies – that is, the ways in which perceptual experiences affect propositional attitudes, actions, and linguistic behaviour. Although this proposal cannot be fully vindicated here, I make a case for it as an extremely plausible working hypothesis.

In chapter 3, I relied on the distinction between experiential content and experiential vehicle: while perceptual experiences have content in the minimal sense that they are about or concern worldly items or states of affairs, they are not identical to their corresponding contents; instead, they are vehicles of content (cf. chapter 3.2). So, for example, when Jim experiences and thinks about a particular bright star, similar contents are instantiated by psychological vehicles of different kinds. Or again, when he sees a star and then looks at the mast of the ship, he instantiates psychological vehicles of identical type (you might call it visual-type) with different contents. The content-vehicle distinction may be used to divide the present discussion into the assessment of two specific questions:

- (a) Is the assertive character of perceptual experiences a feature of experiential contents?
- (b) Is the assertive character of perceptual experiences a feature of experiential vehicles?

Since my discussion of (a)-(b) is rather lengthy, I shall break this task down into three sub-sections: first, I defend a negative answer to (a); secondly, I turn to (b), so as to argue that assertive character and perceptual immediacy may be analysed in functional terms; and, finally, I tackle two potential counterexamples against the previous view.

### 2.1. Assertive Character and Experiential Content

It might be tempting to think that the assertive character of perceptual experiences is a feature of their contents. Indeed, this is precisely suggested by some statements of the relevant property in this dissertation and beyond. When I introduced it, I claimed that perceptual experiences are assertive insofar as the worldly items they present a subject with are presented as being the case; and this claim seems to concern the things perceptual experiences are of. Again, Martin unpacks the stative-semantic distinction as a distinction between different kinds of content: psychological phenomena of a given kind have stative content only if they represent the world as being the case; they have semantic content only if they merely refer to worldly items, without asserting their existence. Glüer follows Martin's steps, for she brings up the notion of assertive character in the context of a representational view of experience: according to her, perceptual experiences are strongly representational, where psychological phenomena are strongly representational iff they represent worldly items or states of affairs as being the case. Thus, the general thought is that perceptual experiences are assertive in virtue of the sort of content they have. What a philosophical story of that feature should then do for us is to identify the specific trait of experiential contents on

which the assertive character of perceptual experiences supervenes. And, as previously mentioned, a constraint on this story will be that the chosen feature should be shared by experiences and beliefs.

This stance is, however, problematic precisely because it is unclear what trait of experiential contents could group experience and belief together, and, at the same time, set them apart from propositional attitudes such as hoping, desiring, etc. That is, for practically any remarkable feature *F* of experiential contents that I can think of, either *F* is not shared by the contents of experiences and beliefs or it is not essential to the assertive phenomena I am concerned with. In either case, *F* fails drawing a line between perceptual experiences and beliefs, on the one hand, and, on the other, non-assertive propositional attitudes such as hopes and desires.<sup>41</sup> As far as I can see, the notion of experiential content may be associated at least with four different features: (i) the worldly items or states of affairs which perceptual experiences present to their subjects; (ii) informational richness and fine-grainedness; (iii) concept-independence or non-conceptual character; and (iv) analog character. (i) does not seem to require further comments. Although (ii)-(iv) are rather delicate features, it is not necessary to have a thorough grip on them<sup>42</sup>: to understand why they cannot account for the assertive character of perceptual experiences, all we need is to have a sense of which psychological categories are and are not characterized by them. As such, I shall keep a description of these features simple here. To begin with, the notions of informational richness and fine-grainedness are often introduced as points of contrast between perceptual experiences and cognitive phenomena downstream perception: so, the general thought is that while our perceptual capacities retrieve richer or finer-grained environmental information via perceptual experiences, beliefs and other propositional attitudes process less or coarser-grained information in order to avoid informational over-load. At this general stage, I group fine-grainedness together with informational richness for two reasons: first, it is unclear what difference, if any, there is between both features; and secondly, both of them are

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41 Martin seems to pursue a very similar line of objection: according to him, a number of prominent features of perceptual content (in a stronger sense of the word 'content' than mine, though) fail to account for their stative (i.e. assertive) character (cf. Martin 2002, 388-9). Again, this point emerges more or less explicitly elsewhere throughout the philosophical literature (cf. Dennett 1996; Speaks 2005; Chuard 2007).

42 But I discuss them further in chapter 5.

used to draw a distinction between perception and cognition, which is, for present purposes, all that matters. Perceptual content has also been described as nonconceptual, in the sense that it is not constituted or otherwise determined by the concepts or conceptual capacities which the relevant perceiver is endowed with. In this respect, the content of experiences is intended to contrast the content of propositional attitudes such as beliefs, for the latter do depend on the conceptual repertoire their respective subjects are endowed with. Finally, perceptual content is also said to be analog as opposed to digital: crudely put, the thought is that, whereas perceptual representation is more like pictorial representation than like sentential representation, the way in which beliefs, among other cognitive phenomena, represent the world is closer to the way in which sentences do so.<sup>43</sup>

None of the previous features underpin assertive character, though. To begin with, it is true that (i) is a feature shared by the relevant psychological categories: both perceptual experiences and beliefs (re)present worldly items to their subjects. But non-assertive attitudes also represent the world: a sailor may hope a certain star to be visible from the main deck; a person may fear that this will be a cloudy night; and so on. There are thus a wide range of propositional attitudes which are non-assertive and, at the same time, represent aspects of the world. As such, (i) could not set apart assertive phenomena from non-assertive one. An initially plausible reply consists in denying that hopes and desires present us with the world exactly the same way perceptual experiences do so: elaborating on Searle's work, one could claim that experiences 'present' us with the world and that non-assertive propositional attitudes only 'represent' it, where 'presentation' and 'representation' stand for mutually exclusive notions. The problem with this line of response is that it is hard to motivate a similar distinction in relation to beliefs: although these propositional attitudes are assertive, it is unclear that the way in which they represent the world is any different from that in which hopes and desires do so. Since (i) does not thereby set perceptual experiences and beliefs

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43 For different characterizations of perceptual content as analog, cf. Dretske 1981; Peacocke 1986, 1989. Although Thau persuasively criticizes fleshing out the experience-belief distinction in analogy to the contrast between pictorial and sentential representation (cf. Thau 2002), I do not think that, say, Peacocke's understanding of perceptual content as analog ultimately rests on the picture-sentence metaphor. This shows that the notion of analog character should be articulated more carefully than I have done here. The present discussion does not depend on the exact import of that feature, though.

apart from non-assertive propositional attitudes, it cannot pick up on assertive character.

Informational richness and fine-grainedness could not play the relevant role either: for, as usually understood in the philosophical literature, these features are taken to constitute a difference, not a commonality, between perceptual experiences and beliefs. Furthermore, it is not even clear that, like assertive character, they constitute essential components of perceptual experiences: after all, a subject could well be visually aware of primitive scenes (e.g. a black square on a white background), in which case the corresponding contents would not be any informationally richer or finer-grained than the contents of their doxastic counterparts. Similar remarks apply to concept-independence and analog character: even if they are features of perceptual content – which is rather controversial – their standard role is that of setting perceptual experiences apart from propositional attitudes in general, including beliefs; again, it is not obvious that those philosophers claiming that perceptual content is nonconceptual and analog would go as far as claiming that perceptual content is essentially so.<sup>44</sup> The foregoing remarks thereby suggest that none of the aforementioned features specifies what it means for perceptual experiences to be assertive.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.2. Assertive Character and Functional Role

Since prominent features of experiential content do not determine the assertive

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44 For example, while José Luis Bermúdez claims that perceptual content need not be conceptual, he is not committed to the modally stronger claim that perceptual content could not be conceptual (cf. Bermúdez 2007). Again, Christopher Peacocke has provided one of the most sophisticated characterizations of perceptual content as analog, but he seems to allow for the idea that there could be perceptual experiences with digital content (cf. Peacocke 1989).

45 The previous remarks aim to show that there is not a direct correlation between any of the features (i)-(iv), on the one hand, and, on the other, the assertive character of perceptual experiences. Another way of pulling the same trick off, I think, consists in comparing cases of assertive and non-assertive psychological attitudes which nevertheless shared the same sort of content – or at least the same sort of features along dimensions (i)-(iv). I do not pursue this strategy here, for it depends on the possibility of conceiving a rather delicate scenario, namely, one where we control for features (i)-(iv) but, at the same time, spin psychological attitudes along the assertive/non-assertive dimension. The line of reasoning I have followed here, meanwhile, relies on actual ascriptive practices: as a matter of fact, perceptual content is conceived as informationally richer or finer-grained than doxastic content; perceptual content is conceived as analog rather than digital; and so on.



character of perceptual experiences, it is time to consider the option behind question (b), namely, that the assertive character of perceptual experiences might be a feature of experiential vehicles. I do think that this suggestion is a live philosophical option. Heck, for example, hints at a position along such lines:

Perceptions are not beliefs: But they may yet be attitudes of some other kind, even if they are not desires, intentions, or entertainings. In fact, I suggest, perceptions *are* attitudes, attitudes that are *like* beliefs insofar as to be in a perceptual state is to hold an *assertive*, or *presentational*, attitude towards a certain content. (cf. Heck 2000, 509)

Of course, more needs to be said, for it is unclear how such psychological attitudes or vehicles exactly instantiate the feature I am concerned with. To address this issue, I shall pursue a functionalist story here: in a nutshell, the main thought is that the assertive character of perceptual experiences (and beliefs, for that matter) is nothing over and above the way in which instances of this category affect or govern other mental phenomena and behaviour. To unpack this position, I shall move in two stages: first, I outline what I take to be a fairly familiar (albeit non-constitutive) connection between assertive character and the functional role of a given psychological category; and, secondly, I go on to hold that this link may be conceived as a constitutive one – as far as I can see, such a proposal is the most straightforward understanding of the relevant connection. The notion of assertive character, it seems to me, simply picks up on part of the functional role that perceptual experiences play within our psychological or epistemic economies.

The link between assertive character and functional role is relatively well-known in the philosophical literature. According to Martin, when an intentionalist philosopher describes perceptual representation as 'stative', she thereby stresses 'a distinctive role in one's mental economy that experience has and the others [i.e. other intentional states] lack.' (Martin 2002, 388) The assertive character of perceptual experiences is closely related to the consequences that such psychological items have within a subject's overall mental economy. In particular, Martin highlights the distinctive epistemological link between experiences and beliefs: although appropriate counter-evidence may challenge the authority of the senses, perceptual experiences tend to fix the content of a subject's beliefs about

her environment (cf. Martin 2002, 390). Experiences' distinctive contribution does not merely consist in causing beliefs, but also in rationally grounding them. While Martin describes but does not endorse a representationalist view of experience, Glüer espouses a stance along that line. According to her, psychological types are defined by their respective functional roles: in this context, she conceives the strongly representational character (i.e. what I call here assertive character) of experiences and beliefs as a commonality on the 'output' side of their functional roles – in particular, as their readiness to make an impact on further cognitive states (cf. Glüer 2009, 308). By focusing on the output side of functional roles alone, Glüer makes room to draw a distinction between both psychological types on their input side: while perceptual experiences are caused by sub-personal cognitive processes, beliefs are caused by other strongly representational attitudes. In chapter 5, I challenge the idea that the 'output' functional role of both psychological categories is the same (cf. chapter 5.4). For the time being, the relevant point is that both Martin and Glüer hint at the possibility of conceiving the key commonality among assertive attitudes as a functional one.

According to the previous writers, then, perceptual experiences affect beliefs by causing and rationally grounding them. One could slightly expand this functionalist picture by noting that perceptual input also affects action and language: that is, a subject's perceptual experiences determine not only what beliefs she has, but also how she could act vis-à-vis her surroundings and, if a language-user, what linguistic reports she could make. This does not mean that the relevant subjects are forced to act or make reports in relation to whatever they happen to perceive. The point is just that a subject's behaviour is sensitive to the deliverances of her perceptual experiences in the sense that she could, but need not make perceptual input manifest in action, speech acts, etc. Of course, the experience-belief link is still paramount within this expanded picture, for perceptual information would most likely influence (loco-motive, linguistic, etc.) behaviour via belief.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Heck notes that there might be cases where, by-passing belief, perceptual input affects action: in particular, he briefly examines cases of 'perception without belief' where, even though she knows things are not so, a subject acts driven by how things appear to her (cf. Heck 2000, 508n.27). To make room for such cases, I refrain from saying that perceptual input *necessarily* affects action via belief.

The foregoing remarks, I think, invite us to understand the assertive character of perceptual experiences as follows:

- (F) The assertive character of perceptual experiences is correlated with a functional role in virtue of which perceptual experiences causally and/or rationally affect (a) propositional attitudes (e.g. beliefs, desires, etc.), (b) action, and (c) linguistic behaviour.

(F) thus draws a close connection between the assertive character and the functional role of perceptual experiences, where the relevant functional role concerns the way in which experiences affect propositional attitudes, action, and linguistic behaviour: it seems fairly clear that perceptual input determines what beliefs and desires we can form, how we may interact with the environment, and what linguistic reports about our surroundings we could perform. Furthermore, beliefs also share the functional role thus ascribed to perceptual experiences: indeed, they are capable of governing certain propositional attitudes (including other beliefs), actions, and linguistic reports. (F) thus satisfies the constraint of latching onto a commonality between the two psychological categories at stake. If other mental phenomena have assertive force, we could reasonably predict that they would share the same feature.

Now, although (F) describes a close relationship between the assertive character and the functional role of perceptual experiences, it is non-committal about the exact nature of such a link. The substantive position I shall espouse here is that the connection should be seen as a constitutive one: assertive character and functional role are not only correlated; the former is actually constituted by the latter. To appreciate this, just consider what would happen if perceptual experiences did not have the sort of functional role outlined in (F): were they not to have any influence altogether in reasoning, action, and language, there is an intuitive sense in which they would simply fail to present their subjects with apparently actual, as opposed to merely possible, worldly items and states of affairs. The assertive force of perceptual experiences commands the corresponding

subjects to take a psychological or epistemological stance on the world: if a given mental state or process lacked any such influence altogether, it would be unclear why it has assertive force. As Glüer noted, psychological categories are typed by their functional roles: accordingly, a reasonable answer to the question what perceptual experiences and beliefs have in common is that their functional roles partially coincide.

In short, I think that (F) could be developed along the following lines:

- (F\*) The assertive character of perceptual experiences is constituted by their ability to causally or rationally affect (a) propositional attitudes (e.g. beliefs, desires, etc.), (b) action, and (c) linguistic behaviour.

The difference between (F) and (F\*) should be more or less clear by now: whereas (F) only states that there is some connection between assertive character and functional role, (F\*) specifies such a link as a constitutive one.

All I am prepared to do here is to endorse (F\*) as a plausible working hypothesis. A full defence of this claim would involve defusing a non-functionalist account of (F), that is, a view according to which the assertive character of perceptual experiences is not (or at least not only) constituted by their functional roles. Such a position does not have to reject the general correlation between assertive character and functional role, of course. To begin with, it could state that assertive character is a fundamental or irreducible feature, that is, a feature which lies beyond a purely functionalist characterization of perceptual phenomena: in relation to perception, for example, one could first argue that assertive character is a phenomenal or sensational aspect which cannot be specified in functional terms. Then, it could set up a contingent link (a causal one, perhaps?) between this non-functional feature and the functional role of perceptual experiences. Hence, it would be possible to save (F) and, at the same time, to reject (F\*).

While a bullet-proof case for (F\*) requires blocking its non-functionalist counter-parts, the latter enterprise goes well beyond the limits of this dissertation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> My own guess is that there is no decisive argument against a non-functionalist view. Even

For this reason, I only presume to endorse (F\*) on the basis of what seems telling but by no means definitive evidence. First, (F\*) is a straightforward and intuitive account of (F). It is straightforward because, unlike a non-functionalist proposal, it does not rely on conceptual resources other than the notions of assertive character and functional role; it claims that the assertive character of perceptual experiences is just a certain sort of functional role. In this sense, a functional story of (F) is more austere than a non-functionalist one. It is, in turn, intuitive because, as I previously stressed, there is an intimate connection between assertive character and functional role. Secondly, the non-functionalist proposal is germane to very much alive, but rather funky, philosophical views relying on notions such as sense-data, qualia, or sensations. As it is sufficiently clear throughout our recent philosophical history, however, these entities face serious difficulties: crucially, they face problems concerning their criteria of individuation and the way they interact with items of the natural world. To pick up on a very specific issue, a non-functionalist account of (F) must not only identify a special non-functional feature in virtue of which perceptual experiences are assertive, but also one which beliefs could credibly share. Thirdly, it is possible to neutralize the counter-examples that a non-functionalist theorist would most likely throw at (F\*). This point is crucial, for (F\*)'s internal coherence (let alone plausibility) depends, among other things, on its ability to deal with such counter-examples. For this reason, I examine some of such cases next.

### 2.3. Potential Counterexamples against (F\*)

Does (F\*) hold water? According to this principle, the assertive character of

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worse, it might turn out that the choice between (F\*) and its denial simply rests on a fundamental decision of principle. Dennett is instructive on this point: a contemporary eminence among critics of non-functionalist accounts of perceptual phenomenology, he acknowledges that, at the end of the day, his own strategy boils down to a persuasive case for one picture of consciousness instead of another: 'I haven't replaced a metaphorical theory, the Cartesian Theater, with a nonmetaphorical ("literal, scientific") theory. All I have done, really, is to replace one family of metaphors and images with another, trading in the Theater, the Witness, the Central Meaner, the Figment, for Software, Virtual Machines, Multiple Drafts, a Pandemonium of Homunculi. It's just a war of metaphors, you say – but metaphors are not "just" metaphors; metaphors are the tools of thought.' (Dennett 1991, 455) Of course, all the issues raised here demand further discussion.

perceptual experiences is constituted by their functional roles. As such, it would face difficulties if,

- (a) instances of an assertive psychological category lacked the sort of functional role which ( $F^*$ ) ascribed to perceptual experiences; or
- (b) instances of a non-assertive psychological category had the sort of functional role which ( $F^*$ ) ascribed to perceptual experiences.

(a) and (b) are schemata capable of embracing specific counter-examples. In this sub-section, I shall focus on one case for each possibility. Furthermore, I shall assume that these cases are paradigmatic: that is, I shall assume that, if it is possible to meet these challenges, it would be possible to provide similar solutions to other versions of (a) and (b).

Since I have already introduced the relevant case – namely, that of ignored perceptual experiences – I shall keep the discussion of (a) brief. This schema asks us to imagine mental phenomena which, apart from having different functional roles within our psychological and epistemic economy, are otherwise identical to our assertive attitudes. To tackle this imaginative project, we may pick up on an instance of an assertive phenomenon – say, a given perceptual experience – and then mess around with its functional role alone. Recall what Jim was up to: he looks for a star on a cloudy night; the sky suddenly clears up; he spots the bright object; and then he remains in perceptual contact with it for a period of time. As the result of this perceptual phenomenon, it is natural to think that Jim will be disposed to do a number of things: forming certain beliefs and linguistic reports about his surroundings ('Lo and behold, a star!'), acting in ways informed by the perceived information (e.g. reporting back to his captain or making a few calculations based on his discovery), etc. He can do all of these things because he is visually aware of the star. Given this scenario, (a) asks us to imagine a case where the visual experience of a possible subject, S, is exactly identical to Jim's experience. By stipulation, S's experience would be assertive: it would, that is, be

committal about the apparent existence of a bright star. But the relevant imaginative project demands something else at this point, namely, to assign to S's experience a functional role which is different from that corresponding to Jim's visual experience: for example, you should imagine that S's experience disposes her not to behave the way Jim would be disposed to behave after spotting the star, but the way he would when entertaining hopes or desires. The relevant experience does not affect S's propositional attitudes, actions, and linguistic reports the way Jim's visual experiences affect his. She would thus have a visual experience which, in all but functional respects, is identical to a perceptual experience which you or Jim could undergo. Does this sort of counter-example challenge (F\*)? As previously anticipated, I do not think so.

For the sake of the argument, there are issues I ignore here. For example, a pressing question I shall not pursue is whether a non-functionalist view could develop a story of assertive character common to perceptual experience and belief: after all, the irreducible features on which non-functionalist stories of perception usually rely tend to be phenomenological ones (e.g. qualia, sensations, etc.), and it is extremely implausible that beliefs could have the same sort of phenomenology that perceptual experiences have. The point on which I focus instead has already been envisaged: the notion of assertive character simply vanishes once perceptual experiences are isolated from their distinctive functional role. This is true if, as Glüer claims, psychological attitudes are typed by their functional roles: since the functional role of the mental phenomenon S instantiates does not correspond to that typical of perceptual experiences, she would fail to be perceptually aware of her surroundings. But one could also reach the same conclusion by reflecting on assertive character and the aforementioned thought experiment. In broad lines, perceptual experiences are assertive insofar as they present their subjects with apparently actual items, or, again, insofar as they commit their subjects to the apparent existence of what is thereby presented to them. Now, if perceptual experiences could not affect reasoning, language, and action, the way they actually affect their subjects – that is, if, like desires and hopes, they did not determine what we take to be actual – in what sense would they commit a subject to take the world to be the way it seems to be? As far as I can see, this line of reply is by no

means circular, for the general understanding of assertive character I invoke here does not rely on (F\*): all the previous question does is, as it were, to pose a challenge against the non-functionalist view from which the above example derives; a challenge which (F\*) can intuitively address. What does it mean to say that Jim's or S's experience is committal or non-neutral in relation to starry presence – in short, that their experiences are assertive? A natural reply is, I think, that perceptual experiences incline their subjects to take the world to be a certain way by affecting their thoughts, actions, and linguistic reports. Indeed, the most obvious sense in which Jim's visual experience is assertive or committal about starry presence is that it has such a pervasive influence in Jim's psychological life. If one renounces to a story along these lines, it will be necessary to identify what non-functional component is constitutive to the assertive character of perceptual experiences. I have not shown or intended to show here that this cannot be done, but, considering the history of non-functionalist views, I would be very much surprised was this project to succeed.

Turning to (b) now, if anything illustrates the possibility of non-assertive psychological phenomena which are, at the same time, functionally indistinguishable from assertive ones, I think that would be the well-known thought experiment of super-blindsight. For present purposes, I shall rely on a fairly broad understanding of this philosophical fiction and the real albeit rare condition from which it derives.<sup>48</sup> Blindsight is essentially a peculiar form of cortical blindness: as the result of damage in the primary visual cortex (or V1), a subject's visual field is partially affected by scotomata (i.e. blind spots). In many respects, blindsight is no different from more standard forms of blindness: on the one hand, there is damage in an area of the brain relevant to vision; and, on the other, the subject's reports and actions by and large correspond to those of a visually impaired person. The funny thing is this: in forced-choice tests concerning visible items occluded by their scotomata, blindsighters score well above chance on certain rudimentary discrimination tasks; and this, in turn, indicates that they are not wholly insensitive to the relevant visual information. Of course, these

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<sup>48</sup> Much has been written on blindsight and super-blindsight. In relation to blindsight, cf. Weiskrantz 1986/2009 and Milner & Goodale 1995. On super-blindsight, cf. Dennett 1991, 1995; Tye 1995; Lowe 1996; Block 1995.



individuals take themselves to bump into the correct answers only by chance, for they insist on their inability to perceive items falling under the relevant scotomata. Now, since there is a minimal sense in which seeing is a way of processing information, and the aforementioned subjects do process some visual information, there is accordingly a minimal sense in which they do perceive their surroundings. From a functional point of view, however, the form of vision blindsighters are endowed with is extremely degraded: for this reason too, the present condition does not illustrate a scenario along the lines of (b).

Super-blindsight is relevant precisely because it bridges the functional gap between the original impairment and normal perception. Imagine that, as a result of similar damage in V1, the relevant subject's visual field is not only partially, but totally affected by scotomata. So, while a super-blindsighter is not visually aware of her surroundings, she still processes visual information. The two main respects in which super-blindsight sharply differs from blindsight are: first, whereas subjects affected by the real condition must be forced to access what little visual information they can, the victims of the fictional impairment need not be coerced; and, secondly, whereas blindsighters only have access to degraded visual information, fairly rich visual input is available to their philosophical counterparts. According to this thought experiment, then, the relevant subject lacks visual experiences, but she spontaneously acquires thoughts about her actual surroundings – visual information, as it were, pops up into her mind bypassing visual awareness. Thanks to the appropriate training, super-blindsighters could thereby navigate and cope with the world in spite of their lack of perceptual experiences: they might still show signs of brain damage and report their lack of perceptual experiences; but, for all intents and purposes, they would behave just like normal perceivers. Hence, this fictional condition seems to illustrate non-assertive mental phenomena which are nevertheless functionally similar to perceptual experiences: even if spontaneously acquired thoughts about her visible environs serve a super-blindsighter well over an extended period of time, it is still conceivable that such thoughts are no more assertive or committal about worldly items than written reports, spoken testimony, or other thoughts simply entertained (that is, not assented to) by the relevant subject. Although super-blindsighters lack

the sort of experiential lives which normal perceivers have, they do instantiate psychological phenomena which, from a functional point of view, suitably replace perceptual experiences.

Does super-blindsight actually undermine (F\*)? This depends on whether the thoughts spontaneously acquired by the relevant individuals are in fact instances of (b), and my main point is that they are not. While I concede that the 'visual' thoughts instantiated by super-blindsighters are non-assertive, it seems incorrect, on closer inspection, to claim that they are functionally similar to perceptual experiences. Consider once again a crucial aspect of the philosophical fiction at hand, namely, that she lacks visual experiences of her surroundings and is capable of ensuing the corresponding linguistic reports. As far as I can see, one cannot renounce this bit of the story: as previously mentioned, the defining condition (i.e. the absence of perceptual experiences) is crucially manifested through the linguistic reports of the affected subjects; after all, brain damage itself is evidential of some defect only if it has subsequent consequences. If they coped with their surroundings without complaining about any defect whatsoever, these subjects would not be impaired in any robust sense. The subject's verbal reports to the effect that she lacks visual experiences thus constitute the best sort of evidence for classifying that subject as a visually impaired one. This being the case, the thoughts acquired by a super-blindsighter cannot be functionally similar to perceptual experiences: for, whereas the latter would dispose their respective bearers to acknowledge their existence, the super-blindsighter's thoughts do not dispose her to recognize any experiential item – on the contrary, our fictional victim by definition insists that she lacks the experiential life that a normal perceiver would enjoy. In general, the psychological attitudes resulting from normal vision and super-blindsight are functionally different because they relate to linguistic behaviour in different ways: that is, they allow their subjects to make different reports about how they have come to know anything about their visible surroundings. Discussions of this thought experiment assimilate the functional roles of super-blindsight thoughts and of perceptual experiences because they overlook the importance of the mind-language relation in a functional characterization of perceptual experiences. Why such a link should be bypassed is

unclear, though.

Of course, the functional difference goes deeper, for the kind of linguistic reports that super-blindsighters and normal perceivers are prepared to issue are related to the networks of propositional attitudes they are endowed with. So, if a subject is prepared honestly to report that she has no perceptual experiences, she will also have beliefs, hopes, and desires concerning her impoverished experiential life. On the contrary, if she can bear witness to her perceptual experiences, this suggests that she does not hold the propositional attitudes that a blind person or a super-blindsighter would hold. Hence, since super-blindsight thoughts and perceptual experiences relate to different linguistic reports, it is also natural to conclude that they relate to different networks of propositional attitudes. In short, I think that, although they may well be non-assertive, the visual thoughts spontaneously formed by super-blindsighters are not functionally similar to perceptual experiences. That is, they constitute neither examples of (b) nor threats to (F\*).

To sum up, I have aimed to specify the notion of assertive character introduced in the previous section. In this context, I have suggested that (F\*) is a straightforward and intuitively plausible account of the relevant notion: for perceptual experiences, to be assertive or to be committal about the existence of worldly items and states of affairs is to affect thought, action, and language by determining what the relevant subject takes to be the case. After arguing that experiential content does not throw lights on the relevant feature, I went on to claim that the assertive character of perceptual experiences may well be constituted by the functional role they have within our psychological economies. To highlight the internal coherency of this working hypothesis, I tackled potential counter-examples to (F\*). Moving on, I shall examine now how ontological views of perceptual experience have a bearing on a discussion of assertive character.

### III. ASSERTIVE CHARACTER, PROCESSES, AND STATES

The goal of this chapter is to show that the assertive character of perceptual

experiences is much better accommodated within the framework of (S) than of (P). Thus far, I have been mainly concerned with the very notion of assertive character: since my case for (S) depends on how that notion is exactly understood, the foregoing discussion is crucial. To close this chapter, I shall explain why a stative view does a better job than a processive one at handling (F\*). In particular, this section proceeds in two stages: first, I argue that the notion of assertive character, understood along the lines of (F\*), poses a difficulty to (P), insofar as it is unclear how mental processes are related to the functional roles which constitute the assertive character of perceptual experiences; and, secondly, I move on to explain why (S) does not face the same obstacle.

My suggestion was to conceive the notion of assertive character as an essential component of perceptual experiences: that feature, I also claimed, may be understood in terms of the impact that perceptual experiences have on thought, action, and language. With this functionalist conception at hand, let's go back to the ontological views of experience I am concerned with. To begin with, assume that perceptual experiences should be described as phenomenally conscious processes. Then, let's suppose (F\*) is an adequate account of assertive character. That being the case, one could press the following challenge: how are perceptual processes related to the functional role in virtue of which perceptual experiences are assertive? I grant that the relevant processes may fulfil a determinate functional role without a larger psychological and epistemic economy. The issue I raise here is an explanatory one: if a processive conception of experiences is intended to shed any light on the nature of perceptual experiences, it is natural to think that it should account for the assertive character of such psychological items. To fulfil the latter task, the processive theorist should specify how phenomenally conscious processes are related to the relevant functional role. As far as I can see, however, she will meet a significant difficulty at this stage. The role played by perceptual experiences within our psychological economy is to a good extent defined by their impact on thought, action, and language. It is unclear to me what kind of story a processive theorist may provide of such relationships. Even if she manages to account for the connection between phenomenally conscious processes and the thoughts they are supposed to ground, chapter 3 highlighted the fact that it

is far from obvious how mental processes relate to behaviour in general (cf. chapter 3.2). If perceptual experiences are phenomenally conscious processes, it is necessary to specify how they relate to other physical and mental processes, physical and mental states, action, and language. I do not claim here that the challenge cannot be met: I only aim to point out the existence of that question, on the one hand, and, on the other, the fact that it has no obvious solution within a processive framework. A stative view could, in turn, deal with the same issue in a far more elegant way. Let's turn to this point.

In particular, consider how perceptual states relate to a functional role of the sort specified in (F) and (F\*). The answer is, I suspect, surprisingly simple: perceptual states are partially constituted by the psychological and epistemic relations which define their functional roles. According to the version of (S) I defend here, perceptual experiences are a subject's instantial states, that is, states which obtain when a subject instantiates a determinate informational relation vis-à-vis her surroundings. As such, key constitutive elements of perceptual states, thus understood, include (i) a subject of experiences, (ii) a subject-environment informational transaction or relation, and (iii) the interval of time at which the previous relation is instantiated by the relevant subject. (i)-(iii) are constitutive parts of perceptual states. This much should be clear since chapter 2. But now note that the informational relations captured under (ii) embrace those informational links in virtue of which the world causes a subject to stand in a certain perceptual state as well as the manifold ways in which those states affect thought, action, and language. A constitutive description of perceptual, instantial states thereby includes a description of the role which perceptual experiences play within a larger psychological and epistemic economy – in other words, a functional role like that invoked by (F) and (F\*). Correspondingly, if (F\*) is an adequate description of assertive character, a constitutive description of perceptual, instantial states includes those ingredients in virtue of which perceptual experiences are assertive. Hence, a stative view seems to throw light on the assertive character of perceptual experiences. The original challenge faced by the processive theorist was how perceptual experiences are related to the functional role which defines their assertive character. If experiences are conceived as mental processes, it is initially

unclear why or how perceptual experiences exactly implement what I called their assertive character. A stative view is, by contrast, not in the same predicament: after all, the functional role outlined by (F) and (F\*) is not merely related to perceptual states, but is a constitutive element of their description. It is not possible to individuate such states without invoking, among other things, the way in which they determine thought, action, and language.

The foregoing remarks may suggest a potential reply in favour of the processive view. I just claimed that the relation between perceptual experiences and the functional role they play in a subject's psychological life poses no problems for (S) insofar as that functional role is a constitutive component of perceptual states. But then, a processive theorist could argue that the mental processes she invokes are such that the functional role that perceptual experience plays in our mental lives is also constitutive of the relevant processes: there would be no relation to trace between perceptual processes and their functional roles because the latter are simply part of what it is to be such processes. If this line of reasoning is plausible, one could thereby conclude that (P) is in no worse position than (S) when it comes to account for the assertive character of perceptual experiences.

The previous reply does not seem satisfactory, though. A processive theorist could no doubt stipulate what kind of processes subjects go through when they are perceptually aware of their surroundings: in particular, she is free to stipulate that the functional role corresponding to perceptual experiences is actually a constitutive element of perceptual processes. But, in doing this, she also seems to renounce to the ontological significance of the processive view. (P)'s distinctive contribution to the debate about the ontology of perception is that an analysis of perceptual experiences would be incomplete if it relied on mental states alone: according to that position, it is necessary to bring mental processes into the picture so as to capture the dynamic and the phenomenological character of perceptual experiences. But if perceptual processes now turn out to be nothing over and above psychological phenomena defined by their functional roles, it is just unclear whether the processive view makes an additional contribution to the ontological landscape envisaged by (S): after all, those psychological phenomena are exactly the same ontological items on which (S) relies. If there is any

controversy between the processive and the stative view at this stage, it only seems to be a terminological one. At this stage, the processive theorist might want to eat her cake and have it: for she might want to hold that, although a certain functional role is constitutive of perceptual processes, it is not exhaustively so; there is still an additional constitutive element of mental processes, corresponding to the 'temporal stuffing' posited by O'Shaughnessy, Soteriou, and Crowther. The latter component, the processive theorist may thus conclude, is not captured by a functionalist specification. But this tactic only takes the original question one level deeper: for the processive theorist now has to address how that meta-functional, constitutive component of perceptual processes relates to their functional, constitutive aspects.

If the considerations unpacked throughout this section are along the right lines, the outcome is this: whereas (S) makes sense of the essential link between perceptual experiences and assertive character, the latter relation is a recalcitrant issue for (P). Although I have not shown that a processive view could not live up to the challenge, I think, first, that (S) is comparatively more straightforward, and, secondly, that it would be reasonable to hold some degree of scepticism about (P)'s ability to deal with the problem at hand.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Throughout the present chapter, I have tried to show how the ontological views I am concerned with – i.e. (S) and (P) – have a bearing on the assertive character of perceptual experiences. As I previously mentioned, assertive character is an essential feature of perceptual experiences. Furthermore, it is a commonality between perceptual experiences and beliefs, and thus constitutes a strategically sound starting-point for an attempt to highlight the ontological similarities between both psychological categories. My main hypothesis was that a significant virtue of the stative view over the processive one is its ability to account for the fact that perceptual experiences are assertive: if the assertive character of perceptual experiences is taken to be constituted by part of their functional role, I think a stative view provides the simplest story of how perceptual experiences are

essentially related to that feature. As the antecedent of this claim makes clear, the present line of reasoning hangs on a specific understanding of assertive character along functionalist lines: for that reason, it was also necessary to dive into a rather lengthy discussion of assertive character itself.

Of course, the line of reasoning unpacked throughout this chapter is not intended to constitute a K.O. argument in favour of (S). Chapters 3 and 4 should only be seen as attempts to motivate the stative view by stressing that, when it comes to deal with certain key aspects of perceptual experiences (i.e. their individuation and their assertive character), that ontological conception faces less difficulties than the processive stance. My own guess is that there is no such a thing as an 'ultimate' argument for (S) or against (P): instead, a case has to be made in the piecemeal way I have pursued throughout these chapters. For the time being, all I hope to convey is a sense that the stative and the processive view have something to say about assertive character, and that the stative view has something better to say than the processive view.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND BELIEF

In reply to the ontological question as to what we talk about when we talk about perceptual experiences, this dissertation has unpacked and discussed two positions, namely, a stative and a processive view. On the assumption that there is a significant distinction between the categories of mental states and mental processes, those ontological views may be briefly expressed as follows:

(S) Perceptual experiences are perceptual states.

(P) Perceptual experiences are mental processes.

Throughout this dissertation, I have made a modest case for a version of (S) capable of dispensing with mental (in particular, phenomenally conscious) processes. To the extent that the notions of state and process are not obviously exclusive, it is unclear that (S) and (P) are incompatible. The initial motivation behind this position was that a conception of perceptual experiences as instantial states is more ontologically austere than a processive view: in the light of a stative framework, the substantive commitment to the existence of phenomenally conscious processes seems unnecessary and even problematic. Chapters 3 and 4 also went on to show that a stative view accommodates otherwise problematic features of perceptual experiences, namely, their individuation over time and their assertive character: within a processive framework, the same features, I think, raise recalcitrant problems. Thus, the overall suggestion is: once perceptual experiences are framed within a relatively austere stative framework, we need not and should not introduce suspicious entities such as phenomenally conscious processes into our ontology of perception.

Although a stative view identifies a key ontological commonality between perceptual experiences and beliefs – that is, their stative character – it need not assimilate both psychological categories. The present chapter thus turns to the question how perceptual experiences stand apart from beliefs.

A prominent contemporary take on this issue is a nonconceptualist view of perceptual experiences. In very broad lines, the perceptual nonconceptualist – or simply nonconceptualist, for short – argues that perceptual experiences are nonconceptual or concept-independent. Such a view does not immediately concern the relationship between perceptual experiences and beliefs, but it is relatively clear that it grounds a criterion of psychological distinction: for, while one might accept that there is a sense in which our perceptual lives are independent of the repertoire of concepts we are endowed with, it is natural to think that what beliefs we can form is constrained by what concepts we possess – in short, that beliefs are conceptual or concept-dependent. In principle, the broad nonconceptualist claim could be specified in two different ways: on the one hand, as a claim about the representational content of perceptual experiences – i.e. content

nonconceptualism; and, on the other, as a claim about the psychological attitudes or capacities involved in the occurrence of perceptual experiences – i.e. state nonconceptualism. Correspondingly, the ensuing psychological divide may be drawn either at a level of representational content or at a level of psychological states. Although a nonconceptualist stance has traditionally been interpreted along the lines of the content-reading, this chapter turns to state nonconceptualism so as to relate it to the stative view I have developed and defended. In particular, my goal is to show that, to the extent that it addresses a key explanatory objection against state nonconceptualism, the stative view accommodates the thought that perceptual states are nonconceptual. If one feels sympathy for a nonconceptualist stance, in general, and a state reading, more specifically, the present analysis will thus unveil another virtue of (S).

This chapter is divided into four parts. To begin with, I expand a bit further on the general question what sets perceptual experiences apart from beliefs, and then highlight two levels at which the relevant distinction may be drawn: that of representational contents, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of psychological states. Section 2 critically assesses three potential criteria of psychological distinction, each one of them related to three features famously ascribed to the content of perceptual experiences: informational richness, fine-grainedness, and analog character. This survey aims, first, to highlight the limitations of most attempts to distinguish perceptual experiences from beliefs at the level of their respective representational contents, and, secondly, to set the ground for a more attractive distinction based on a nonconceptualist stance. In section 3, I turn to the distinction between content nonconceptualism and state nonconceptualism. Although the content-reading has been the most fashionable version thus far, it builds on the assumption that perceptual experiences have representational content. I focus on state nonconceptualism precisely because this position remains silent on what is now regarded as a highly controversial question, namely, whether perceptual experiences are representational: more specifically, it remains silent on this question in the sense that, unlike content nonconceptualism, it would be tenable even if perceptual experiences turned out not to be representational. Finally, section 4 links state nonconceptualism to a stative view of experience via a

prominent objection faced by the former position. In a nutshell, the worry is that merely claiming that perceptual states are nonconceptual does not settle *why* perceptual experiences are nonconceptual: it may well be true that perceptual states are nonconceptual, but this claim does not on its own throw any light on why perceptual experiences should be so conceived. Correspondingly, the relevant position could not explain why perceptual experiences stand apart from beliefs: at best, it could only formulate the distinction. In reply, I shall argue that the informational-functionalist story underpinning a stative view (cf. chapters 2 and 4) could complement state nonconceptualism so as to meet the previous explanatory challenge.

To clear this up right away, the present discussion does not constitute a case against perceptual conceptualism, that is, the view according to which perceptual experiences are in some sense conceptual or concept-dependent. Neither am I defending state nonconceptualism against content nonconceptualism. These issues transcend the present chapter. My goal may be expressed in conditional form: if one adopts a stative view of experience, one could also address the aforementioned explanatory challenge faced by state nonconceptualism. More generally, I intend to show how a stative view could accommodate a significant distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs. A full defence of state nonconceptualism would, meanwhile, presuppose a critique of content and state conceptualism, content nonconceptualism, and nonrepresentationalist views of experience. Such an enterprise, however, constitutes the subject of a different dissertation.

## I. EXPERIENCE AND BELIEF

A recurrent theme in the philosophy of mind is the analysis or conceptual anatomy of different psychological faculties and phenomena. In this tradition, David Hume famously claimed that '[e]very one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking.' (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 1-2) It is no doubt true that we intuitively acknowledge different mental types: at a very general level of description, there is the difference between thinking and feeling; and, more

specifically, one may distinguish perceptual experiences, beliefs, hopes, among other propositional attitudes. But, as it is well known by now, Hume's claim is controversial to the extent that it is far from obvious what principles govern the conceptual classification of our mental geography. Indeed, a prominent issue in the philosophy of perception is how perceptual experiences and beliefs exactly relate to each other: that is, the challenge is to identify the commonalities as well as the differences between both psychological categories. For illustrative purposes, I shall use a very simple example.

### Example 3

In good lighting conditions, an unimpaired perceiver, Molly, faces a white wall on which a black square has been drawn. For a respectable amount of time, Molly remains still with her eyes fixed on the black square. Hence, Molly sees a black square on a white background, and what she perceives does not look to her like anything other than a black square on a white background. In short, Molly has a visual experience of a black square on a white background. A while later, Molly shuts her eyes: at this point, she ceases to experience the square. Immediately after doing that (but perhaps not too soon after that, so as to avoid potential confusions with visual iconic imagery), she positively believes that there is a black square on a white background in front of her.

In spite of their similarities, the mental tokens introduced in this example belong to different psychological kinds, namely, experiencing and believing. To facilitate the comparison, I normalize both tokens as much as possible: they have the same subject (i.e. Molly) and are about the same worldly items, the latter being kept at a minimum. With these pieces in place, the question I wished to address in this chapter could be formulated as follows: on the assumption that both perceptual experiences and beliefs are mental states (as opposed to mental events or processes), how could one account for the difference between Molly's visual

experience and her belief concerning a black square on a white background? The relevant psychological difference does not seem to be defined either by subject or by intentional object: after all, both tokens have the same subject and are about the same worldly items. How could one thereby address the previous question?

As far as I can see, the distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs may be developed at least in two directions:

- (1) Perceptual experiences and beliefs differ from each other insofar as they involve different kinds of states or attitudes.
- (2) Perceptual experiences and beliefs differ from each other insofar as they involve different kinds of representational contents.<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, there are at least two general ways of accounting for the difference between Molly's visual experience and her subsequent belief. First, she might be said to instantiate state-tokens of different kinds in each occasion: at one time, she instantiates a perceptual state presumably directed to the very worldly items of Molly's surrounding; then, she instantiates a doxastic state. This proposal is not exhaustive, of course: as just formulated, (1) does not amount to much more than a formal acknowledgement of the difference between perceptual experiences and beliefs; as such, it is necessary to specify how their underpinning states exactly differ from each other. But, as far as I can see, the legitimacy of this story is not automatically undermined by its initial indeterminacy. One way of developing (1) is along functionalist lines: that is, one could argue that perceptual experiences and beliefs are different because they involve different kinds of mental states, and that perceptual and doxastic states in turn stand apart from each other because they

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<sup>49</sup> By talking of *representational* content here, I wish to distinguish this technical notion of content from the broader notion I used in chapter 3: back then, I introduced a minimal sense of content according to which perceptual experiences have content if they are *of* or *about* worldly items or states of affairs (cf. chapter 3.1). In relation to (2), meanwhile, I turn to the far more controversial notion of content at the heart of the debate between representationalists (e.g. Brewer 1999, Siegel 2010, Pautz 2010) and nonrepresentationalists (e.g. Campbell 2002, Travis 2004, Brewer 2011).

play different functional roles within a subject's psychological and epistemic economy.<sup>50</sup> In section 4, I shall precisely spell out how the stative and the nonconceptualist view of experience I favour relate to each other within a functionalist framework.

The second way of spelling out the difference between Molly's visual experience and her subsequent belief is as one concerning representational contents of different kinds. In one version of this stance, perceiving and believing are ways in which a subject represents the world, but they constitute different ways of representing the world. The notion of intentional object most naturally related to the notion of belief is thus extrapolated into a description of perceptual experiences: hence, one could argue that, although Molly's visual experience and belief are about a black square – the same square, if you may – there is a specific difference in the ways in which they concern or represent the same worldly item.

Throughout this chapter, I pursue the first strategy. But I also concede that (2) may seem more natural (cf. Brewer 2011, 57-8): after all, a vast amount of work in contemporary philosophy of perception is devoted to elucidating the distinctive nature of perceptual content vis-à-vis the content of other psychological categories. For this reason, the remainder of this chapter proceeds in a roundabout way: instead of turning to the difference between perceptual and doxastic states head on, I first examine a number of ways in which the difference between perceptual and doxastic contents might be developed. By doing so, I hope to highlight the limitations of specifying the experience-belief divide at the level of representational content, and, at the same time, to motivate a distinction exclusively based on the difference between perceptual and doxastic states.

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50 Bill Brewer states that the difference between perceptual experiences and thoughts could be addressed by positions like (1) and (2). He also acknowledges that (1) could be developed along functionalist lines (cf. Brewer 2011, 56ff.). Brewer's claims do not exactly overlap with my remarks, though. First, he addresses the general distinction between perceptual experiences and thoughts, whereas I keep close to the more specific contrast between perceptual experiences and beliefs. Secondly, Brewer builds a controversial conception of perceptual experiences as propositional attitudes into his critique of (1) and (2). Unlike him, I seek to endorse (1) and do not assume that perceptual states or attitudes have to range over propositions.

To set perceptual experiences apart from beliefs, one may attempt to stress substantive differences between their respective contents. This tactic naturally requires picking up on a determinate representational feature (either a perceptual or a doxastic one) capable of grounding the relevant distinction. In this section, I examine three features that have traditionally been associated with perceptual content vis-à-vis doxastic content: in particular, I argue that, although typical of perceptual content, such elements do not capture characteristic traits of perceptual experiences, and, as such, fail to deliver the desired psychological distinction. Thus, I expect to highlight the limitations of conceiving the difference between perceptual experiences and beliefs at the level of their respective contents.

For the time being, this section divides into three sub-parts, where I examine and critically assess attempts to ground the relevant psychological distinction on the notions of informational richness, fineness of grain, and analog character, respectively.

### 2.1. Informational Richness

To begin with, I shall introduce the notion of informational richness relevant to perceptual experiences. Then, I shall formulate and critically assess a criterion of distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs building on that feature.

The thought that perceptual experiences are informationally rich has been widely invoked in the philosophical literature. To take one example, Michael Tye says that, 'in typical cases, visual experiences are rich. This is to be understood as the thesis that typically visual experiences contain more information than their subjects are able to extract cognitively (in belief or judgment).' (Tye 2006, 519; also cf. Chuard 2007, 20) As Fred Dretske points out, specifying the notion of information is not a trivial task (cf. Dretske 1981, ch. 1). Again, Tye's understanding of the relationship between perception and cognition has recently met a good deal of resistance. That said, this line of thought takes off from a fairly



intuitive point: our perceptual capacities are capable of processing a large amount of information about our surroundings; or again, the environmental information that perceptual experiences present us with is quite generous. Pursuing this line of thought, Philippe Chuard claims that, when seeing a particular scene,

[...] it seems that the overall spatial arrangement of the scene is represented in your visual experience. But this means that the shape of the various objects that make up the display, together with their location and the spatial relations that hold between such objects, must also be represented in your experience. If you can perceive the shape and location of these objects, this must owe partly to the fact that their colour – as well as the chromatic differences between such objects and their respective backgrounds – are represented in your experience too. (Chuard 2007, 29)

When a subject perceives her surroundings, she becomes perceptually aware of a great deal of details about the environment – in other words, that she receives a vast amount of information via her senses. Of course, there is a sense in which this thought is uncontroversial: whether personal-level, conscious perception does process a high rate of information or not, it certainly seems as if it did so to their subjects. Even if scientific evidence spoke against the informational richness of perceptual experiences, there is no doubt that, when I observe my room, it seems to me as if I saw a wide range of worldly objects and their sub-parts.

The previous characterization of perceptual experiences has fuelled a popular criterion of distinction between perceiving and believing. The relevant divide could, I think, be expressed as follows:

(2.a) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is informationally richer than doxastic content.

Informational richness could thus be conceived not only as a typical feature of perceptual experience: somewhat more strongly, (2.a) suggests that it sets perceptual experiences apart from beliefs. With this distinction at hand, I take it

that informational richness is intended to pick up on an aspect of the representational content of perceptual experiences: the claim that perceptual experiences are informationally richer than beliefs concerns a difference between what (or, to be more precise, how much information) perception and belief present a subject with. As such, it is natural to formulate the corresponding criterion of psychological distinction as one about perceptual and doxastic contents: while perceptual experiences have contents which are informationally rich, the contents of cognitive phenomena lack that feature.

In the present context, then, the notion of informational richness is doing two things for us: on the one hand, it refers to a typical feature of perceptual experiences; and, on the other, it sets perceptual experiences apart from beliefs, among other cognitive states. Both roles should be kept apart: after all, one could concede that perceptual experiences are informationally rich and, at the same time, reject (2.a). In this sub-section, I assume that informational richness does constitute a typical feature of perceptual experiences. But does that feature distinguish perceptual content from doxastic content? This is far from clear. As far as I can see, the present criterion faces at least two kinds of difficulties: first, it is often driven by controversial motivations; and, secondly, since it does not pick up on a necessary and sufficient feature of perceptual experiences, it is unclear how the corresponding criterion could set perceptual experiences apart from beliefs. I turn to both issues next.

The idea that perceptual experiences informationally overflow mental states downstream perception is often motivated with the help of Sperling's experiments on iconic or visual memory (cf. Sperling 1960; also cf. Averbach & Coriell 1961).<sup>51</sup> On a basic version of these experiments, a subject is briefly presented with an ordered grid of letters: shortly after the grid's disappearance, the relevant subject is capable of reporting how many letters it contained; she is, however, incapable of providing a full list of which letters she has seen. On a variation of this basic case, the subject is cued by tones of varying degrees of pitch right after the grid's offset – normally, only a few milliseconds after its

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<sup>51</sup> In the philosophical literature, these experiments are used to illuminate the relationship between perceptual experiences and attention, on the one hand, and, on the other, that between perceptual experiences and iconic memory.

disappearance. The purpose of these tones is to indicate in each case which series or row of letters has to be identified: thus, a high-pitched tone means that one has to identify the letters of the upper row; a middle-pitched tone means that one has to identify the letters of the middle row; and a low-pitched tone refers to the lower row. Although test-subjects would again be hard pressed to list every letter from the grid, they are extremely good at identifying all or most letters from the row they were instructed to pick up on. The cuing tone is presented a few milliseconds after the grid has disappeared, and since the relevant subject has no way to guess which row of letters she will be instructed to identify, the experiment apparently suggests that there is a difference between what is perceptually processed and what is cognitively accessed by the test-subject. In particular, a number of philosophers take experiments of this kind to suggest that a subject is perceptually aware of more information than she can cognitively access.<sup>52</sup> Thus, while a subject could identify the relevant row of letters because she is actually aware of all the letters when she sees the grid, her reports are bound to the limited amount of perceptually acquired information available to cognitive states (i.e. to memories, beliefs, etc.).

The previous line of motivation is controversial, though. In particular, a number of writers have recently provided paradigms for thinking about perceptual experience where Sperling's experiments do not support the claim that perceptual experiences informationally overflow our attentional capacities or our memory store. James Stazicker, for example, plausibly argues that perceptual experiences could present or represent fairly indeterminate information (cf. Stazicker 2011). In the present context, this possibility is significant: following Stazicker, one could then argue that a Sperling subject is not fully aware of all the letters in the grid; instead, her perceptual experiences may simply represent every letter in an indeterminate way. Granted: to access more determinate information after the activation of the aural cue, the relevant subject must somehow possess it beforehand. But Stazicker's point is, I take it, that the test-subject need not have that information in a conscious way before or at the time of the cuing tone: for all we know, she could have it at a sub-personal or unconscious level. Ian Phillips does

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52 Cf. Block 1995, 2008; Tye 2006, 509-20, specially 518; Dretske 1996, 2006; Burge 2007.

not invoke the indeterminacy of perceptual content, but phenomena of postdictive perception in order to challenge the extent to which Sperling's experiments support the 'overflowing' claim (cf. Phillips 2011). Phillips reminds us that there is plenty of experimental evidence in support of the thought that perceptual awareness of a given stimulus may be affected by our perceptual awareness of a second stimulus taking place briefly after the first stimulus. Since the interval between the offset and onset of the first and second stimuli, respectively, often matches the interval of time between the offset of the lettered grid and the onset of the tonal cue in Sperling's experiments, Phillips suggests that the latter experiments fit the paradigm of postdictive perception in general. Thus conceived, the relevant cases would not show that subjects may perceive more than what they can cognitively access: instead, they show that a subject's awareness of the lettered grid is affected by her awareness of the cues presented a few milliseconds later. According to this paradigm, the tonal cue would not constitute an instruction for accessing part of a larger amount of information a subject has already been conscious of: together with information of the grid processed at a sub-personal level, it determines the test-subject's experience of the grid. The present remarks on Stazicker's and Phillips's work are by no means exhaustive. They only intend to suggest that Sperling's experiments – an apparently important motivation behind a criterion of distinction like (2.a) – do not necessarily show that perceptual experiences are informationally richer than cognitive states downstream perception.<sup>53</sup>

An alternative route for motivating (2.a) could perhaps rely on pre-theoretical, phenomenological grounds. Recall that Chuard introduces the informational richness of perceptual experiences as a fairly uncontroversial phenomenological datum. Likewise, one could go on to argue that pre-theoretical reflection on the relationship between perception and cognition supports a principle along the lines of (2.a): that is, just as perceptual experiences seem to present us with a vast amount of information about our surroundings, our repertoire of concepts seems to be too coarse-grained to capture all the details perceptually presented to us. But this line of motivation is also controversial, at least to the extent that the notion of perceptual phenomenology is too elusive to

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<sup>53</sup> For further critical literature on the motivations behind (2.a), also cf. Irvine 2011.

ground substantive philosophical claims about the nature of perceptual experiences. To take one example alone, Dennett makes a compelling case against a conception of perceptual experiences as a sort of phenomenological repository (cf. Dennett 1991, 359-62).<sup>54</sup> As far as I can see, there is no problem in using claims about perceptual phenomenology as the subject-matter or the starting-point of philosophical reflection: using them to legitimize substantive philosophical tenets is, in turn, much more controversial.

Setting its typical motivations aside, (2.a) faces a more fundamental problem, namely, that informational richness seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of perceptual experiences. In other words, a subject could undergo sense experiences which are as informationally rich or degraded as some of her cognitive states downstream perception: that being the case, (2.a) would not provide a criterion sufficiently robust to set perceptual experiences apart from beliefs. Informational richness is not *sufficient* for perceptual experiences because we could in principle conceive a subject of thoughts and experiences whose cognitive capacities are not informationally limited in the way ours are. A subject endowed with absolute or perfect pitch (that is, a subject capable of remembering and reidentifying sounds they have heard before) could constitute a basic model for developing an example along such lines. That feature is not *necessary* for perceptual experiences either: impaired subjects (e.g. short-sighted perceivers) or unimpaired subjects perceiving extremely basic states of affairs may have coarsely-grained experiences. So, Molly may have a visual experience and a belief concerning the same worldly state of affairs, e.g. a black square on a white background: although her experience would be neither more nor less rich than her belief, it is still natural to draw a line between both mental tokens. Thus, (2.a) apparently fails to pick up on a distinctive feature of perceptual content capable of setting perceptual experiences apart from beliefs.

In short, (2.a) is a problematic criterion of psychological distinction. To begin with, its typical motivations are controversial. But perhaps more importantly, informational richness does not seem to be a necessary and sufficient condition of perceptual experiences.

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<sup>54</sup> For a different critique of the notion of phenomenal character, cf. Snowdon 2010.

## 2.2. Fine-Grainedness

Now I introduce the notion of fine-grainedness relevant to perceptual experiences. Then, I formulate and critically assess a criterion of distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs building on that feature.

Like informational richness, fine-grainedness is widely recognized in the literature on perceptual content (e.g. Evans 1982, 229; McDowell 1994, 56; Heck 2000, 489-90; Tye 2006, 519). Christopher Peacocke expresses the notion as follows:

Writers on the objective content of experience have often remarked that an experience can have a finer-grained content than can be formulated by using concepts possessed by the experiencer. If you are looking at a range of mountains, it may be correct to say that you see some as rounded, some as jagged. But the contents of your visual experience in respect of the shape of the mountains is far more specific than that description indicates. The description involving the concepts *round* and *jagged* would cover many different fine-grained contents which your experience could have, contents which are discriminably different from one another. (Peacocke 1992b, 111; also cf. Peacocke 1992a and 2001, 240)

In this quote, Peacocke hints at two things that perceptual fine-grainedness may refer to: on the one hand, that the content of perceptual experiences is more determinate than that of cognitive phenomena; and, on the other, that our perceptual capacities of discrimination are more sensitive to incoming stimuli than our cognitive capacities of type-identification. The fine-grainedness of perceptual content may thus refer (i) to the determinacy of perceptual content itself, or (ii) to the discriminatory sensitivity of our perceptual capacities.

The resulting criterion of psychological distinction could be stated as follows:

(2.b) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is finer-grained than doxastic content.

On the basis of the previous remarks, (2.b)'s explanans could in turn be specified in two different ways:

- (i) Perceptual content is finer-grained than doxastic content iff  
perceptual content is more determinate than doxastic content.
- (ii) Perceptual content is finer-grained than cognitive content iff  
a subject's perceptual capacities of discrimination are more sensitive to incoming stimuli than her cognitive capacities of type-identification.

In correspondence with (i) and (ii), the above criterion of distinction has two different readings – call them (2.b.i) and (2.b.ii), respectively. To get a grip on these criteria of distinction, it is of course necessary to say a bit more about (i) and (ii).

According to (i), perceptual content is finer-grained than doxastic content in the sense that the former is more determinate than the latter. In this context, the notion of determinacy is usually fixed through examples. Basic paradigms are provided by concepts of colour- and shape-properties structured alongside the determinable-determinate dimension: coloured-red, red-scarlet, shaped-circular, among other contrasts. The notion of perceptual determinacy builds on that kind of examples. Thus, one may compare perceptual experiences so as to claim that a visual experience, say, of a red<sub>23</sub> apple is more determinate than a visual experience of a red apple; or again, that a visual experience of a square object is more determinate than one of a mere geometrical figure. Only with a difference of degree, (2.b.i) uses the same examples in order to set perceptual experiences apart from beliefs: while we see determinate qualities (e.g. red<sub>21</sub> or red<sub>23</sub>), we only think of determinable ones (e.g. red, crimson, or indigo); again, one may believe that the top of a mountain is jagged or round, but a visual experience of the same object conveys more determinate qualities than merely *jagged* or *round*. These examples,

among others, are thus intended to illuminate the notion of determinacy at stake in (i) and (2.b.i).

Although often spelt out in terms of (i), statements of perceptual fine-grainedness also invoke (ii). Fred Dretske, for instance, formulates a distinction along the lines of (2.b) in the following terms:

At the level of experience, I am sensitive to (i.e., can discriminate) all manner of differences in the light, sound, pressure, temperature, and chemistry of objects affecting my senses. I nonetheless have a limited conceptual repertoire for categorizing these sensory differences, for making judgments about [...] the differences I experience. [...] At the sensory level I can discriminate hundreds of different colors. At the conceptual level I operate with, at best, a few dozen categories for the colors I experience. (Dretske 1995, 18)

For Dretske, the difference between perception and cognition concerns, among other things, the discriminatory potential of perceptual and cognitive capacities. Diana Raffman hints at a similar distinction saying that, 'with rare exceptions, discrimination along perceptual dimensions surpasses identification. In other words, our ability to judge whether two or more stimuli are the same or different in some perceptual respect (pitch or colour, say) far surpasses our ability to type-identify them.' (Raffman 1995, 294)

I take it to be fairly clear that, like informational richness, determinacy is a feature of perceptual contents, not perceptual states. It may be less obvious how (ii) feeds into a distinction between perceptual and doxastic contents: this issue, however, might be addressed by means of an additional premise to the effect that a subject's perceptual discriminations determine what content their perceptual experiences have; hence, identifying a distinctive trait of our capacities of perceptual discrimination would indirectly highlight a distinctive aspect of perceptual content. That said, even if determinacy and discriminatory sensitivity – that is, the features picked up by (i) and (ii) – are typical features of perceptual content, the corresponding criteria of distinction (2.b.i) and (2.b.ii) face complications.

In a nutshell, the problem with (2.b.i) is that it collapses into a criterion of distinction along the lines of (2.a), thereby failing to provide a necessary and



sufficient condition of perceptual experiences vis-à-vis beliefs. The issue assessed in these sub-sections is whether informational richness and fine-grainedness could draw a line between two unequivocally different psychological categories, i.e. perceptual experiences and beliefs. Now, an assumption of the discussion thus far is that both features constitute different components of perceptual content, a point that finds more systematic support in the philosophical literature. Michael Tye, for instance, notes that richness fails to constitute a necessary component of perceptual experiences: instead, this feature only seems contingently to depend on the way in which living organisms like human beings evolved. As previously mentioned, one might think of cases where there is no informational barrier on the cognitive side – that is, we could imagine organisms that can judge about as much information as they can perceptually process; or, conversely, cases where informational barriers are imposed on the perceptual side – that is, where a perceiver has experiential access to very little information. By framing the relevant difference as only one of degree, the notion of informational richness apparently blurs the divide between perceptual and doxastic content. Setting fine-grainedness apart from informational richness is thereby motivated as an attempt to reflect the intuitively radical difference between perceptual experiences and beliefs; a difference, that is, which informational richness alone cannot capture.<sup>55</sup>

As just anticipated, however, conceiving perceptual fine-grainedness along the lines of (i) threatens to collapse (2.b) into (2.a). The point is, I think, fairly manifest on the basis of some examples: when a subject perceives or thinks about *O* in a determinate way  $w_1$ , she accesses more information than she would if *O* were presented in the less determinate way  $w_2$ ; conversely, if a subject were presented with *O* in the determinate way  $w_2$ , there would be a loss of information in relation to  $w_1$ . For instance, when I see Marston Ferry Road on a foggy day, I access less information than I do when I stare at the same scenery on a clear day: the former experience is informationally poorer than the latter. If this is all one means by coarse-grainedness, then the notion has collapsed into that of informational paucity; and, correspondingly, that of fine-grainedness into informational richness. The assimilation also emerges in the philosophical literature whenever the notion

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<sup>55</sup> For a similar motivation to set the fine-grainedness of perceptual content apart from its informational richness, cf. Peacocke 1989, 315).

of fine-grainedness is refined. After setting this notion apart from informational richness – in particular, after identifying fine-grained but informationally poor experiences and coarse-grained but rich experiences – Chuard ends up collapsing both notions when he recognizes that '[t]o some extent, the difference between (i) fineness of grain and (ii) informational richness is a matter of degree, since a fine-grained representation of  $x$  will typically contain more information about  $x$  than a non-specific one.' Immediately after this, and in order to bridge the gap between the two relevant notions, he adds that 'the additional information involved in (i) is *about* particular properties or objects (the ones presented in more detail). With (ii), the additional information is about different objects and properties, so that it *need* not contain specific information about anything in particular.' (Chuard 2007, 29n.10) But this qualification seems to come a bit too late, for fine-grainedness simply bottoms up as a sub-class or special version of informational richness. Bill Brewer also hints at a similar line of thought. In an attempt to understand paradigmatic forms of hallucinatory experiences, he claims that '[i]n certain cases, experiences are therefore to be construed most fundamentally as merely degraded acquaintance with the physical objects in question.' (Brewer 2011, 116) According to him, experiences concerning determinable properties (e.g. an experience of an object, located in the periphery of the visual field, which looks red but no particular shade of red; or an experience of blurry objects) are to be understood as cases of degraded acquaintance, where I take 'degraded acquaintance' just to be informationally poor awareness of worldly items. Hence, (2.b.i) seems to be a problematic gloss on (2.b): lest it be otherwise redefined, it collapses (2.b) into (2.a), thus exposing the former to the latter's problems.

Turning now to (2.b.ii), the main problem springs from a point flagged by Raffman: our perceptual capacities' relative superiority over our cognitive skills is contingent on how the subjects of such psychological phenomena are constituted (cf. Raffman 1995, 295-6). Human beings happen to be constituted in such a way that they perceptually pick up on more information than that they can conceptually process. This relative richness hangs on constraints imposed on perceptual memory: in order to type-identify (or subsume under concepts) perceived objects and properties, a subject has to remember what she has thus

perceived; but it seems that human memory has only so much capacity to store information about perceived objects and properties; thus, limitations on human memory also impose limitations upon our capacities of conceptual identification. This informational asymmetry naturally has an evolutionary rationale: to avoid information overload, it is sensible for an organism to store only part of the information she latches onto; was it not for the natural limits set by perceptual memory, our cognitive capacities would be crushed or delayed by an overflow of perceptual information. And it should be clear by now that (2.b.ii) relies on such a contingent distinction. The reason our capacities for perceptual discrimination surpass our capacities for type-identification is that our cognitive capacities downstream perception get less information than that retrieved by our senses. Raffman stresses this feature by describing the role which perceptual memory has in the previous asymmetry: memory sets a bar to what we can type-identify because it stores less information than it is perceptually available. Accordingly, one could in principle conceive subjects whose perceptual experiences and beliefs are not appropriately distinguished by means of (2.b.ii).

In short, it is unclear that fine-grainedness manages to draw a line between perceptual and doxastic content, let alone between perceptual experiences and beliefs.

### 2.3. Analog Content

The last criterion of distinction I shall examine in this section may be formulated as follows:

- (2.c) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is analog (or analogically encoded), whereas doxastic content is digital (or digitally encoded).

The relevant contrast here is one between analog and digital ways of representing or encoding information: perception or perceptual experiences stand apart because they process analogically encoded information; cognitive phenomena, in turn, involve digital representations or processes where information is digitally encoded.

To understand whether (2.c) is a suitable criterion of distinction, it is of course necessary to get a grip on what analog (as opposed to digital) means. And this already proves to be a recalcitrant issue, as the notion of analog representation or encoding of information is by no means a clear-cut one. In his seminal piece on the analog-digital divide, John Haugeland reminds us that analog and digital are engineering notions lacking the clarity and distinction dear to philosophers (cf. Haugeland 1982, 217, 220). To fix some of their uses, Haugeland focuses on devices capable of registering and reproducing information of a certain kind – in his own terminology, 'feasible procedures for writing and reading tokens' of a certain kind (cf. Haugeland 1982, 215). Within this context, he characterizes analog devices as those (i) that register and reproduce information in a smooth or continuous way, that is, without gaps (*smoothness*); (ii) for which only certain dimensions of variation are relevant (*dimensionality*); and (iii), for which, within a relevant dimension of variation, every difference makes a difference (*sensitivity*). In virtue of these features, Haugeland describes an analog device as an 'approximation procedure', that is, as a means of processing information whose capacity for successfully or accurately representing input information necessarily has a margin of error, no matter how small it may be. Digital devices, in turn, stand apart from analog ones precisely on the count of fallibility: they constitute positive procedure, where 'a positive procedure is one which can succeed [i.e. in registering and reproducing information of a certain type] absolutely and without qualification—that is, not merely to a high degree, with astonishing precision, or almost entirely, but perfectly, one hundred percent!' (Haugeland 1982, 214) Analog and digital watches provide helpful examples. In relation to the representation of time, an analog watch exhibits the features of smoothness, continuity, and sensitivity: accordingly, it is a device effectively capable of representing time, but always within a margin of error. Digital watches, meanwhile, constitute positive

procedures for representation: by registering and reproducing information in a discrete (i.e. non-continuous) way, digital watches are better suited than analog ones to represent information about time precisely. This section is of course not concerned with the analog-digital distinction at this level of generality, but Haugeland's remarks correctly stress that the way in which the relevant pair of concepts should be understood is, at least to a good extent, context-dependent. As far as I know, two writers, Fred Dretske and Christopher Peacocke, have applied the analog-digital contrast to the sort of issue I am concerned with, namely, the experience-belief distinction. Furthermore, both of them have used it in different ways. I turn to their proposals next.

Dretske uses the digital-analog contrast to get a grip on the relationship between perception and cognition: accordingly, he applies it in a way that should also illuminate the more specific relation between perceptual experiences and beliefs. The starting-point of Dretske's proposal is a difficulty faced by an informational account of the mind (cf. Dretske 1981, 135): if the activities of the human mind (perception, cognition, etc.) are understood in terms of informational transactions between informational sources and executive systems (that is, via different informational channels), is it possible to save intuitively different psychological phenomena from collapsing into a more or less homogeneous informational process? Dretske wishes to endorse what may be termed a broadly informational-functionalist model of the mind, but he recognizes that this framework might obscure the distinctive contributions that perception and cognition make to our psychological economy. Although an informational theorist, Dretske also wishes to accommodate the intuitive difference between, say, perceptual experiences and beliefs.<sup>56</sup> 'Perception is,' Dretske first claims, 'concerned with the pickup and delivery of information, cognition with its utilization.' (Dretske 1981, 135) And the analog-digital contrast is brought up precisely to flesh this point out.

Dretske's understanding of the analog-digital distinction in general is

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<sup>56</sup> The problem is of course not new to philosophers: if the differences between perception and cognition are exaggerated, it becomes unclear how they relate to each other; on the other hand, if their commonalities are stressed, one runs the risk of obscuring their differences. The way I see it, Kant and Hume faced these problems, respectively.

similar to that of Haugeland's. 'It is traditional', he says, 'to think of the difference between an analog and a digital encoding of information as the difference between a continuous and a discrete representation of some variable property at the source.' (Dretske 1981, 135-6) When it comes to expand on this general distinction, he goes on as follows:

I will say that a signal (structure, event, state) carries the information that *s* is *F* in *digital* form if and only if the signal carries no additional information about *s*, no information that is not already nested in *s*'s being *F*. If the signal *does* carry additional information about *s*, information that is *not* nested in *s*'s being *F*, then I shall say that the signal carries this information in analog form. When a signal carries the information that *s* is *F* in analog form, the signal always carries more specific, more determinate, information about *s* than that it is *F*. Every signal carries information in both analog and digital form. The most specific piece of information it carries (about *s*) in digital form. All other information (about *s*) is coded in analog form. (Dretske 1981, 137)

On the face of it, the relevant contrast is one between continuous and discrete ways of *encoding* information. Elaborating on this point, however, Dretske argues that, given a piece of information '*s* is *F*', a signal *S* represents *s*'s being *F* in an analog way if *S* carries more information about *s* than that it is *F*; a signal *S* carrying the same piece of information will be digital, in turn, if *S* fails to carry more information about *s* than that it is *F*. As here formulated, the main difference between analog and digital representations of '*s* is *F*' is that an analog representation conveys more information about *s* than the corresponding digital representation. This reading is reinforced by Dretske's gloss on what the process of digitalization amounts to:

To describe a process in which a piece of information is converted from analog to digital form is to describe a process that necessarily involves the *loss* of information. Information is lost because we pass from a structure [...] of greater informational content to one of lesser information content. Digital conversion is a process in which irrelevant pieces of information are pruned away and discarded. Until information has been lost, or discarded, or information-processing system has failed to treat *different* things as essentially the *same*. It has failed to classify or categorize, failed to generalize, failed to "recognize" the input as being an instance (token) of a more general type. (Dretske 1981, 141)

Dretske qualifies these remarks by noting that digitalized information is discriminately and selectively filtered (cf. Dretske 1981, 260*n.5*), but this does not change the crucial fact that the main difference between analog and digital

representations is a quantitative one relative to a certain represented state of affairs: the analog-to-digital conversion of information is fundamentally a process where information is discarded, lost.

On the basis of the previous distinction, Dretske relates perception to cognition as follows:

Perception is a process by means of which information is delivered within a richer matrix of information (hence in *analog* form) to the cognitive centers for their selective use. Seeing, hearing, and smelling are different ways we have of getting information about *s* to a digital-conversion unit whose function it is to extract pertinent information from the sensory representation for purposes of modifying output. (Dretske 1981, 142)

According to this proposal, our senses deliver informationally rich representations: perceptual activity consists in registering input information, where the resulting representations reproduce detailed information about the perceiver's surroundings. Through a process of digitalization, cognitive capacities downstream perception retrieve this information and filter it so as to make it more manageable. If perceptual experiences are conceived as the vehicles of perceptual representations and beliefs as a particular kind of cognitive representations, I think that Dretske's conception of the perception-cognition link also provides a criterion of distinction along the lines of (2.c).

It should be clear by now what difficulty I wish to charge the previous criterion with: like (2.b.i), this way of conceiving (2.c) collapses into a proposal like (2.a), and hence, faces a similar problem. Perceptual content stands apart from doxastic content because it is analog as opposed to digital: but, for Dretske, being an analog representation of a given state of affairs simply amounts to representing more information about that state of affairs than the corresponding digital representation. As such, the distinctive component of perceptual content turns out to be nothing more than informational richness.<sup>57</sup> According to this proposal, cognitive digitalization amounts to a process of information-elimination: '[c]ognitive activity is the *conceptual* mobilization of incoming information, and this conceptual treatment is fundamentally a matter of ignoring differences (as

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<sup>57</sup> This is basically the same point that Peacocke 1989, 314 makes against Dretske's use of the analog-digital pair in order to set perception apart from cognition.

irrelevant to an underlying sameness), of going from the concrete to the abstract, of passing from the particular to the general.' (Dretske 1981, 142) As he sees it, the formation of concepts and conceptual representations is simply underpinned by the elimination of perceptual information in a discriminate and selective way. In relation to conceptual representations, perceptual representations convey a richer amount of information to a subject. In section 2.1, however, I noted that informational richness does not constitute a necessary or sufficient condition of perceptual experiences: hence, it does not seem to provide a satisfactory way of distinguishing perceptual experiences from beliefs.

As previously mentioned, Peacocke builds on a different way of understanding the analog-digital pair: unlike Dretske, he keeps the contrast between continuous and discrete ways of representation in sight so as to avoid collapsing the notion of analog character into that of informational richness. This characterization of perceptual content as analog, however, is also motivated by an attempt to reflect the different ways in which perception and thought allow a subject to access the world (cf. Peacocke 1989, 303). To use one of Peacocke's examples, there are different ways in which we may come to know the size of a table: on the one hand, we could look at it and thus become perceptually aware of the table and its size; or, on the other, we could be told the table's dimensions in inches, centimeters, meters, or other metric units. Both ways of addressing the table's size are intuitively different: only one feature in which they differ, Peacocke tells us, is that perceptual awareness provides *unit-free* knowledge of magnitudes. The notion of analog character comes into play precisely to capture the distinctive way or manner in which perception conveys the world to a subject:

There is a sense in which manners of perception conforming to these principles and which featured in our initial examples can be described as an *analog*. As a first approximation, a type of manner is analog provided that there is some dimension of variation such that for any pair of distinct points  $d, d'$  on that dimension, there are two manners of the given type one of which is a manner of perception of something which is or includes  $d$  but not  $d'$ , and the other of which is a manner of perception of something which is or includes  $d'$  but not  $d$ . The dimension may be direction or size, but it is neither confined to these, nor to spacial characteristics. (Peacocke 1989, 304)

In subsequent work, Peacocke revisits the idea of analog content in more



accessible terms:

To say that the type of content in question [i.e. the objective content of experience] is analogue is to make the following point. There are many dimensions – hue, shape, size, direction – such that any value on that dimension may enter the fine-grained content of an experience. In particular, an experience is not restricted in its range of possible contents to those points or ranges picked out by concepts – *red, square, straight ahead* – possessed by the perceiver. (Peacocke 1992b, 111-2)

As one may appreciate from this quote, Peacocke links the analog character to the fine-grainedness of perceptual content. Leaving this complication aside for the time being, there is a relatively clear thought cutting across both passages. Peacocke picks up on those low-level properties which visual experiences are most likely to represent: hue, shape, size, direction, etc. Each one of these qualities may be conceived as a dimension (that is, a quality-dimension) the points of which stand for all the determinate forms the relevant property may take, systematically ordered in the quality-dimension at stake. Consider one particular colour, red. This colour may be thought of as a quality-dimension – which may in turn belong to another quality-dimension, namely, that of colours – the points of which are all the possible varieties of red there are. Additionally, assume that perceptual experiences do represent properties like redness. That said, the first quote above states that, for a quality-dimension corresponding to a property P and for any two points, p and p', along that dimension P, a visual experience may always represent property P in a manner corresponding to p but not to p', or vice versa. Perceptual manners, the ways in which perception represents properties, or again, the contents of perceptual experiences, may be conceived as analog if they form a continuous pattern along one of such quality-dimensions. The second quote, in turn, expands on the previous thought by suggesting, in connection to the fine-grainedness of perceptual content, that the aforementioned quality-dimensions indeed count with an extremely rich number of points: no matter how many concepts a subject may have in order to conceptualize or type-identify different shades of red, her conceptual repertoire will always run short of all the different manners in which our visual experiences may represent red.

But could Peacocke's characterization of perceptual content as analog

ground a criterion of distinction along the lines of (2.c)? I do not think so: in a nutshell, the problem is that analog content, as conceived by Peacocke, does not seem to be a necessary mark of perceptual experiences. Peacocke certainly characterizes the perception-cognition distinction in terms of the analog-digital contrast: given a quality-dimension constituted by a structured pattern of continuous quality-points, visual experiences are capable of representing properties corresponding to points in such a dimension; concepts (and, accordingly, all those cognitive events or states depending on concepts) only pick up on entire strips of quality-dimensions – that is, they are not (perhaps cannot be) sensitive to all the different points within a quality-dimension. In accordance with this line of reasoning, conceiving perceptual experiences with digital content would amount to conceiving perceptual experiences the contents of which are not sensitive to all the differences corresponding to points within a quality-dimension. But it turns out that such experiences are not too hard to envisage. A standard normal human being may well perceptually discriminate  $\text{red}_{23}$  from  $\text{red}_{24}$ ; a subject having perceptual experiences with analog content is, in turn, simply one that fails making discriminations like these. As far as I can see, a given subject could, say, have a visual experience of a determinable colour without discriminating what determinate colour it is: instead of perceiving  $\text{red}_{23}$  or  $\text{red}_{24}$ , this subject could perceive a red blur. The thought that perceptual experiences could represent merely determinable properties is indeed a live philosophical option in the current literature. Stazicker, for example, observes that 'it's tempting to assume that we always see maximally determinate properties. Perhaps this is because of our tendency to reify visual experience, to confuse determinacy in experience with the determinacy of its objects.' (Stazicker 2011, 172) But this reification, he notes, is unwarranted. In particular, Stazicker challenges the thought that all perceived properties are necessarily determinate for two reasons. First, he invokes scientific evidence supporting the limited and varying resolution of vision: whether foveal or perifoveal vision be at stake, the spatial resolution of the representations produced by the visual system decays with the spatial frequency which that representation registers, where spacial frequency is the rate of change of a phenomenon across space. Secondly, he also brings up a phenomenon known as the crowding effect: 'when a stimulus is presented in the periphery of a subject's visual field,

surrounded by other slightly different stimuli, the subject is sometimes unable to identify the specific character of the stimulus.' (Stazicker 2011, 173) According to Stazicker, a natural way of thinking about this phenomenon consists in supposing that the unidentified stimulus is perceptually (not just cognitively) represented in a purely determinable way. These scientifically informed remarks are, I suspect, additionally supported by parochial phenomena, e.g. the sort of blurry vision short-sighted people are well aware of. If such considerations are along the right lines, I think one could plausibly argue that perceptual experiences may (and, in many cases, do) represent more or less extensive segments of a quality-dimension. Hence, analog character would not be a necessary trait of perceptual experiences.

Apart from the previous remarks, a decisive point is that Peacocke himself conceives the possibility of 'digitalized' perception: 'We can conceive of our visual experience being digitized in a 1000x1000 matrix of squares. A visually perceived straight line of squares would then be perceived in a distinctive manner. This manner would not be counted as analog under the first approximation, with its requirement about *every* pair of points on the relevant dimension.' (Peacocke 1989, 304) This concession is somewhat puzzling: Peacocke first uses the notion of analog content to characterize perception vis-à-vis cognition, only to allow then that visual experiences might have digital content. I am inclined to think here that, although Peacocke takes analog content typically to be a prominent feature of human perceptual experience, he would not aim to frame it as a necessary and sufficient criterion of perceptual experiencehood.<sup>58</sup>

Summing up. Although Dretske and Peacocke hold that perceptual content is typically analog, their respective views do not ground a principle of distinction like (2.c). In Dretske's characterization, the analog character of perceptual content collapses into its informational richness: as such, the resulting principle of experience-belief distinction would simply constitute a reformulation of the problematic principle (2.a). Peacocke's characterization of perceptual content as analog does not seem to meet the same fate, but it is also clear that, as he understands it, analog character is not a necessary feature of perceptual experiences. Hence, I conclude that it is unclear how (2.c) could account for the

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<sup>58</sup> In conversation, Professor Peacocke seems to have confirmed this suggestion.

distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs.

Throughout this section, I have examined different ways in which the distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs may be drawn at the level of perceptual and doxastic content. The general point I thus aimed to press is that the relevant distinction cannot exclusively rely on the notion of perceptual content. In the next section, I examine a nonconceptualist view of perceptual experiences so as to keep pressing the same point. My positive proposal will be that an analysis of the relevant psychological distinction has to look into the differences between perceptual and doxastic states.

### III. CONTENT AND STATE NONCONCEPTUALISM

The previous section showed that certain features of perceptual content – namely, informational richness, fine-grainedness, and analog character – do not seem to distinguish perceptual experiences from beliefs. This outcome, I suspect, partially suggests that the relevant psychological divide should not be specified at the level of perceptual and doxastic contents. In a modest attempt to explore the possibility of drawing that distinction at the level of perceptual and doxastic states or attitudes, I shall discuss a nonconceptualist view of perceptual experiences. The present section is divided into three sub-parts. First, I introduce the general thought that perceptual experiences are nonconceptual or concept-independent as a component in a distinction between experiences and beliefs. Then, in the following two subsections, I unpack two ways of reading the general nonconceptualist thought, and hence, the corresponding criterion of psychological distinction: after all, the relevant position could be taken to concern either perceptual contents or perceptual states. Content nonconceptualism has no doubt been the most popular version: however, to the extent that this chapter aims to explore a criterion of distinction at the level of psychological states (as opposed to representational contents), I shall focus on state nonconceptualism. At the end of this chapter, I specifically explain how the state-reading dovetails with a stative

view of experiences.

### 3.1. General Nonconceptualism

To begin with, let's turn to the following criterion of distinction:

(?) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual experiences are nonconceptual, whereas beliefs are conceptual.

According to (?), perceptual experiences do not depend on concept-possession in the same way beliefs do. Although the principle is no doubt extremely general, its reliance on a nonconceptualist understanding of perceptual experiences should be fairly manifest.

To a first approximation, perceptual nonconceptualism may be stated as follows:

*NC*: Perceptual experiences need not be conceptual.

(NC) is no less general than (?), but it makes vivid a crucial thought: according to the nonconceptualist, there is a sense in which the perceptual experiences a subject has are not necessarily constrained by the repertoire of concepts she is endowed with. This position naturally contrasts with a conceptualist stance, that is, the view that conceptual capacities do necessarily determine what kinds of perceptual experiences a subject could have.

To an important extent, the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism is an epistemological one: for, while the conceptualist often invokes concept-dependency as a feature capable of throwing light on the question how perceptual experiences justify beliefs, among other propositional attitudes (cf.

Mcdowell 1994, 1998); the nonconceptualist seeks to show that, even if concept-independent, perceptual experiences could still fulfil the same justifying role (cf. Heck 2000). Although this delicate aspect of the controversy is no doubt crucial, recall that the present chapter is not interested in vindicating nonconceptualism over conceptualism, or vice versa: instead, all I aim to do here is to distinguish two readings of (NC), so as to develop a distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs at the level of psychological states or attitudes – that is, so as to develop an instance of (1).

In sub-section 3.2, I briefly state the content-reading in terms of which (NC) and, accordingly, (?), are traditionally understood. To set content nonconceptualism aside, I shall sketch the following difficulty: although the content-reading of nonconceptualism and conceptualism emerged at a time when it was popular to think that perceptual experiences have representational content, the latter claim is now deemed to be extremely controversial; as such, the worry is that, in virtue of its problematic assumption, a content-reading would be unable to express (NC), let alone (?), against the background of an increasingly popular nonrepresentationalist conception of perceptual experiences. Then, in 3.3, I move on to unpack the state-reading of (NC). Since it downplays the role of perceptual content in a characterization of (NC), it does not face the same difficulty I pressed against the content-reading. Perhaps more importantly, I think it could specify (?) as a version of (1), that is, as a specific distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs at the level of their respective states or attitudes.

### 3.2. Content Nonconceptualism

(NC) is naturally far too general. In particular, the claim is silent on, first, how concept-independence (and, contrastively, concept-dependence) should be understood, and, secondly, what specific feature of perceptual experiences that notion is supposed to determine. Fully to specify the nonconceptualist claim, it is necessary to address both issues. Throughout this section, however, I shall not discuss the import of the conceptual and the nonconceptual. The two versions of

(NC) I shall unpack only relate to the second question, that is, what is specifically said to be nonconceptual, no matter how the latter feature be understood.

Since its inception into the philosophical mainstream, nonconceptualism has traditionally been read as a claim about the representational content of perceptual experiences. Thus, it could be expressed along the following lines:

*CNC*: Perceptual experiences have representational contents which need not be conceptual or concept-dependent.

(CNC) tells us that perceptual content need not be conceptual. All it does for us in the present context is to specify the exact sense in which perceptual experiences are supposed to be concept-independent: they are nonconceptual because the representational contents they incorporate are so. This formulation, meanwhile, remains fairly neutral on how the contrastive pair of the conceptual and the nonconceptual should be understood. Without abandoning this neutrality, one could alternatively say that perceptual experiences need not have the same sort of content that paradigmatically concept-dependent propositional attitudes (e.g. beliefs) have. This formulation is no less neutral than (CNC): after all, it relies on a contrast with paradigmatically conceptual attitudes, but does not fix on any particular understanding of the conceptual and the nonconceptual. A fully determinate characterization of perceptual nonconceptualism has to get a fix on the notion of concept-independence. In other words, it has to settle what it means to be nonconceptual. (CNC) aims to provide no such a characterization, though: it only highlights the intimate link that many nonconceptualist philosophers envisage between concept-independence and perceptual representational content. This is why (CNC) may be suitably termed content nonconceptualism.

By partially specifying (NC) in terms of (CNC), the criterion of psychological distinction formulated in (?) could also take a more determinate shape. On the basis of content nonconceptualism, one may set perceptual experiences apart from beliefs as follows:

(2.d) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is nonconceptual, whereas doxastic content is conceptual.

Like (CNC), (2.d) is silent on the import of concept-independence. Again, to the extent that it draws the relevant distinction at the level of perceptual and doxastic contents, this criterion apparently presupposes that perceptual experiences have representational content. Thus, while (CNC) and (2.d) are relatively flexible on the question what concept-independence amounts to, they are stuck with the notion of perceptual representational content. As previously anticipated, the point I shall press next precisely concerns (CNC)'s reliance on a representationalist understanding of perceptual experiences.

In a nutshell, the difficulty I have in mind is this: to the extent that they rely on the notion of representational content, (CNC) and (2.d) are legitimate claims only within the boundaries of a representationalist model of perceptual experiences; against the backdrop of a nonrepresentationalist framework, however, content nonconceptualism would not throw light on perceptual experience and its relationship to belief. Of course, to appreciate the force of this complaint, it is necessary to say a bit more about a nonrepresentationalist view of perceptual experience.

Nonrepresentationalism is actually an umbrella term for a family of views related by their common rejection of a theoretical framework where perceptual experiences are taken to represent the world in a certain way to a subject of experiences. In other words, a nonrepresentationalist view primarily refers to any position driven by a rejection of what Bill Brewer calls the Content View, a theory according to which 'the most fundamental account of our perceptual relation with the physical world is to be given in terms of the complete representational contents of perceptual experience' (Brewer 2011, 54-5). According to a representationalist or content-based stance, how things perceptually appear to a subject is conceived as a way of representing the world. For a number of ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological reasons which I shall not rehearse here, that conception of



perceptual experiences was extremely popular at the time Fred Dretske and Gareth Evans championed a nonconceptualist stance (cf. Dretske 1981; Evans 1982). Alas, philosophical fashions change. For different reasons, an important number of philosophers have challenged the thought that perceptual experiences have representational content (cf. Martin 2002; Campbell 2002; Travis 2004; Brewer 2006, 2011). Driven by direct or naïve realist intuitions, for example, certain writers hold that, at a fundamental level of characterization, an analysis of how things perceptually appear to subjects could dispense with representational ingredients: instead, they argue that a philosophical story of perceptual experiences only has to specify the complex ways in which a subject is perceptually related to her surroundings (cf. Campbell 2002, 2011; Brewer 2011). Relationally understood, a description of perceptual experiences need not invoke the notion of representational content. But, for the same reason, a relational understanding of perceptual experiences could not accommodate (CNC) or (2.d): in general, no nonrepresentational account of perception make room for either claim. As I previously noted, content nonconceptualism as well as its negation, content conceptualism, presuppose that perceptual experiences have representational content. By dispensing with the latter assumption, a nonrepresentationalist stance would not strictly speaking refute a nonconceptualist view: more dramatically, it would undermine the very terms in which (CNC), (2.d), and their corresponding negations, are formulated.

Having said that, it is important to appreciate the limitations of the foregoing remarks. To begin with, I do not intend to develop an objection in favour of content conceptualism: the previous line of reasoning targets a conceptualist stance no less than a nonconceptualist one. Again, I have not made a case against a representationalist view of experience. The present discussion has indeed touched on two paramount debates in contemporary philosophy of perception: on the one hand, that between conceptualists and nonconceptualists; and, on the other, that between representationalists and nonrepresentationalists. In this context, all I have intended to do here is to say something about the relatively neglected question what bearing these debates have on each other. Specified along the lines of a content-reading, conceptualism and nonconceptualism are only

accommodated by a representationalist view of experience. Within a nonrepresentationalist framework, however, both positions do not seem to be intelligible. To the extent that it depends on (CNC), (2.d) is also incompatible with a nonrepresentationalist stance. Since I have not set out to undermine representationalism, these exploratory remarks do not undermine (CNC). But the foregoing considerations do raise a problem for (CNC) and its negation on the plausible assumption that the choice between conceptualism and nonconceptualism should be intelligible even beyond the boundaries of a representationalist framework.

In short, this sub-section has aimed to suggest (but by no means to prove) that, given current trends in the representationalism-nonrepresentationalism debate, the most popular version of the nonconceptualist claim, (CNC), might not ground a satisfactory distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs. Granted: in spite of its current popularity, nonrepresentationalism may be incorrect, in which case the difficulty I have pressed here would be innocuous. But this is yet to be proven. The present remarks thus draw from the fact that nonrepresentationalist views of experience constitute a legitimate option in the current philosophical scene. At the present stage of the debate between representationalism and nonrepresentationalism, it would be reasonable to formulate (NC) and, correspondingly, (?), in a way sufficiently flexible to be compatible with representationalist as well as nonrepresentationalist views. So, while the previous line of reasoning does not constitute a K.O. case against (CNC) and (2.d), I hope it provides a reasonable motivation to explore alternative formulations of (NC) and (?). I turn to one of such alternatives next.

### 3.3. State Nonconceptualism

Although the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism has traditionally been framed along the lines of a content-reading, an interesting development has taken place in the past few years. A number of writers have recently suggested that the relevant positions of this debate do not concern how

the content of perceptual experiences is constituted, but how we should think of the psychological states or attitudes involved in perceptual experiences. In other words, the suggestion is that a claim like (NC) could be taken to ground an instance of (1) rather than (2). The goal of this sub-section is, first, to unpack a state-reading of (NC) and its corresponding version of the criterion of distinction (?), and, secondly, to address a potential objection based on the thought that even state nonconceptualism partially relies on the notion of perceptual representational content.

A state-reading of (NC) is prominent in the work of Jeff Speaks and Thomas Crowther (cf. Speaks 2005 and Crowther 2006; also cf. Heck 2000, Toribio 2008 and Duhau 2014). To begin with, Speaks acknowledges the existence of a position like (CNC): that is, a view according to which perceptual experiences have 'a different kind of content than do beliefs, thoughts, and so on.' (Speaks 2005, 360) But he also flags an interpretation where '[a] mental state of an agent A (at a time *t*) has relatively nonconceptual content if and only if the content of that mental state includes contents not grasped (possessed) by A at *t*.' (Speaks 2005, 360, also cf. 392n.4) Speaks thus distinguishes two readings of a nonconceptualist view, namely, an *absolute* and a *relative* one. Whereas the absolute version roughly corresponds to (CNC), relative nonconceptualism seems to specify (NC) as the view that perceptual experiences are nonconceptual iff they could be had without the need of possessing those concepts required to express their contents. By means of this contrast, Speaks highlights the fact that relative nonconceptualism is not primarily a position about the nature of perceptual content: otherwise, it would collapse into absolute nonconceptualism. What the alternative nonconceptualist stance is intended to deliver is a characterization of the relationship between subjects and the content of their perceptual experiences, that is, of experiential states or attitudes. Although the notion of perceptual content may figure in Speaks's description of relative nonconceptualism, the latter position does not throw light on experiential contents as such.

Crowther, meanwhile, identifies a *compositional* and a *possessional* reading of nonconceptualism (as well as of their conceptualist counterparts). Compositionally understood, the nonconceptualist thesis holds that the contents of

perceptual experiences are not composed or constituted by concepts (cf. Crowther 2006, 250). Like (CNC), this position concerns the nature of perceptual content. A possessional conception, in turn, reads as follows:

(NC<sub>poss</sub>) Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a nonconceptual content iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to be undergoing *e*, *S* must possess the concepts that characterize *p*. (Crowther 2006, 252)

This view does not answer to the question whether perceptual content is composed of concepts, but to that whether a subject of perceptual experiences need possess the concepts required to describe the content of such experiences.

Crowther's possessional nonconceptualism and Speaks's relative nonconceptualism coincide at least in two respects: on the one hand, they take distance from attempts to specify the representational content of perceptual experiences; and, on the other, they focus on the question what the conditions for having experiential states are. Hence, it should be relatively clear that both writers aim to identify a version of (NC) which is not primarily concerned with the nature of perceptual content, but with the psychological states or attitudes which underpin our perceptual experiences.

Speaks's and Crowther's proposals no doubt differ in points of detail. Josefa Toribio, however, specifies (NC) in a way which apparently captures the spirit of relative and possessional nonconceptualism:

*SNC*: For any perceptual experience *E* with content *C*, any subject *S*, and any time *t*, *E* is nonconceptual<sub>s</sub> iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to undergo *E*, *S* must possess at *t* the concepts that a correct characterization of *C* would involve. (Toribio 2008, 354)

Indeed, I think (SNC) – that is, a state-reading of (NC) – captures the key elements of Speaks's relative reading and Crowther's possessional version: first, (SNC) is not strictly speaking a claim about the nature of perceptual content; and, secondly, it invokes the notion of concept-independence to characterize perceptual states, not perceptual contents. Unlike (CNC), the present stance does not crucially rely on the assumption that perceptual experiences have representational content.

As such, I think (SNC) is not exposed to the same sort of difficulty I pressed towards the end of the previous sub-section: that is, I think that (SNC) as well as its negation – state conceptualism – could be accommodated within a representationalist and a nonrepresentationalist understanding of perceptual experiences.

On the basis of (SNC), an alternative reading of (?) is available too:

(1.a) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual states are nonconceptual, whereas doxastic states are conceptual.

Both (2.d) and (1.a) use the notion of concept-independence in order to draw a line between perceptual experiences and beliefs: but, while (2.d) takes that feature to characterize the content of perceptual experiences, (1.a) only takes it to specify the psychological states or attitudes underpinning perceptual experiences. The criterion of distinction deriving from (SNC) draws the relevant distinction at the level of psychological states. In other words, it is an instance of (1). Furthermore, since it hangs on (SNC), (1.a) seems to be an intelligible criterion of distinction within a representationalist as well as a nonrepresentationalist conception of perceptual experience.

At this point, however, one could raise the following worry: to the extent that she still invokes the notion of perceptual content, the state nonconceptualist faces the same problem I pressed against the content nonconceptualist, namely, the threat of making her position unintelligible within a nonrepresentationalist framework. Although (SNC) does not directly concern the nature of perceptual content, it is still a claim about the relationship between subjects and perceptual contents: as such, it seems to presuppose that perceptual experiences are representational. I suspect that several specific objections against (SNC) hint at this partial reliance on the notion of perceptual content. For example, a potential line of objection takes off from the thought that perceptual states and perceptual contents are so intimately related to each other that (SNC) entails (CNC): for, if this is

correct, a critic of the state-reading could complain that (SNC) is somewhat redundant – after all, (CNC) would be enough to express that the contents and states involved in perceptual experiences are nonconceptual. For the time being, my point is just this: since state nonconceptualism assumes that perceptual experiences have representational content, its intelligibility also seems to be bound to a representationalist conception of perception.

I do not think that (SCN) makes the same controversial assumption, though. To appreciate this, one should distinguish a broad and a narrow sense of perceptual content. First, there is a fairly intuitive sense in which our perceptual experiences are of or about worldly items or states of affairs. For example, when Jim sees a bright star from  $t_1$  to  $t_x$ , he undergoes a visual experience of or about a bright star. There is thus a trivial sense in which perceptual experiences are about things other than themselves – that is, intentional. This is the notion of perceptual content I invoked in chapter 3. Of course, this broad sense in which perceptual experiences are intentional or have content is philosophically uncontroversial. The notion of perceptual content at stake in the debate between representationalists and nonrepresentationalists is a heavier-duty one. A narrower notion of content thus derives from an attempt to extrapolate a neo-Fregean conception of thought or belief into an analysis of perceptual phenomena (cf. Evans 1982; Peacocke 1992a, 1992b). In this context, the notion of perceptual content is introduced so as to suggest that perceptual experiences represent the world as being a certain way, that perceptual experiences incorporate relatively fine-grained modes of presentation, that perceptual experiences contain a propositional component relevant for their type-specification, and so on. With this distinction at hand, it should be more or less clear why (SNC) need not be constrained by a representationalist conception of experience: although the state conceptualist advances a claim about the relationship between subjects and contents, the contents thus invoked may be understood broadly, not narrowly. (CNC) obviously depends on a narrow understanding of perceptual content, for its most prominent formulations (e.g. Evans's, Peacocke's) commonly emerge within a neo-Fregean framework of cognition and perception. Meanwhile, by spelling out nonconceptualism and its negation in terms of a state-reading, what I wish to show

is precisely that the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism need not rely on such a neo-Fregean framework – in other words, that (NC) or its negation could be set against a representationalist as well as a nonrepresentationalist backdrop. Hence, the present formulation of (SNC) need not incorporate a narrow conception of perceptual content: as far as I can see, it could perfectly well rely on the broader notion.<sup>59</sup>

In support of the claim that state nonconceptualism need not involve a heavy-duty notion of perceptual content, it is worth noting that (SNC) could be reformulated so as to avoid any references to the content of perceptual experiences:

(SNC\*)      For any perceptual experience *E*, any subject *S*, and any time *t*, *E* is nonconceptual, iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to undergo *E*, *S* must possess at *t* any particular concept.

(SNC\*) is almost identical to Toribio's formulation of state nonconceptualism: the only difference is that (SNC)'s revised version does not refer to the content of the relevant perceptual experiences. At its heart, the nonconceptualist's point is not that certain experiences may be independent of one or another concept, but that they may be independent of any concept whatsoever. (SNC) as well as (SNC\*), I think, capture this core idea. (SNC\*) does not latch onto the sub-set of concepts one would typically use to specify the content of a given type of perceptual experience: it simply stipulates that an organism could have perceptual experiences of a certain kind even if she lacked any particular sub-set of concepts or conceptual capacities. (SNC) additionally invokes the notion of perceptual content in order to get a fix on the concepts most commonly used to express what certain perceptual experiences are about. But while this extra bit may

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59 In an attempt to defend state nonconceptualism, Laura Duhau argues that (CNC) and (SNC) rest on different notions of representational content (cf. Duhau 2014). Although her strategy may thus resemble the line of thought I rehearse here, our stances are actually quite different. To make sense of (SNC), Duhau brings up a philosophically loaded notion of representational content. By the end of this subsection, however, I hope it will be clear that I take state nonconceptualism to be independent of any such representational component or, perhaps, only to depend on a pre-theoretical notion of content.

be informative, one may dispense with it.

To sum up. This section has unpacked two readings of (NC) and the criterion of experience-belief distinction, (?). In relation to the first and most traditional version of (NC) – namely, content nonconceptualism – I noted that it relies on the assumption that perceptual experiences have representational content: as such, this position or its negation, content conceptualism, could not be accommodated within a nonrepresentationalist framework of perceptual phenomena. Similar remarks apply to the principle of distinction resulting from (NC), namely, (2.d). Then, I introduced a more recent gloss on (NC), namely, state nonconceptualism: since (SNC) does not presuppose that perceptual experiences have representational content, I think it could be accommodated within a representationalist as well as a nonrepresentationalist framework. Accordingly, (SNC) grounds a criterion of psychological distinction, (1.a), which does not depend on the controversial question whether perceptual experiences are representational. This logical independence from the debate between representationalism and nonrepresentationalism is, I think, a systematic virtue of (SNC) and (1.a) over (CNC) and (2.d). In the next section, I shall finally relate (SNC) to the stative view of experience I have advocated here, the ultimate purpose of which is to show that, even if perceptual experiences and beliefs are mental states, one could still draw a significant distinction between both psychological categories.

#### IV. PERCEPTUAL STATES AND NONCONCEPTUALISM

In chapters 1 and 2, I introduced and developed a stative view of perceptual experiences: that is, a position according to which these psychological items are conceived as mental states obtaining in a subject, not as temporally protracted events constituted by processes of a phenomenally conscious kind. The goal of this chapter is to show that, although a stative view sets experiences and beliefs on the same side of the event-state divide, it *could* still accommodate a sharp distinction between both psychological categories – whether it *should* accommodate this distinction not being a question I address here. To pursue this task, I began by



critically assessing a number of criteria of psychological distinction at the level of perceptual and doxastic contents. Then, I turned to a recent reading of a nonconceptualist stance, state nonconceptualism, according to which perceptual states or attitudes (as opposed to perceptual contents) need not be concept-dependent: this position, I think, grounds a criterion of psychological distinction at the level of perceptual and doxastic states. To close the present chapter, I shall briefly relate state nonconceptualism and its resulting criterion of distinction to the stative view of experience I previously defended.

In the present context, the significance of the stative view becomes manifest as an answer to a prominent objection against state nonconceptualism. The general worry seems to be that (SNC) is unmotivated. José Luis Bermúdez puts the thought nicely by saying that 'the state view proposes a principled distinction between concept-dependent state-types and concept-independent state-types. Plainly, proponents of the distinction owe us an account of where it comes from. Why is it the case that beliefs do, while perceptions do not, respect the conceptual constraint?' (Bermúdez 2007, 68) Along similar lines, Toribio presses that 'the real question is why believing, but not perceiving, is thus constrained by concept possession.' (Toribio 2007, 357) Even if the claim that perceptual experiences need not be concept-dependent addresses the question *how* perceptual experiences differ from beliefs, it does not tackle the more important question *why* perceptual experiences need not be concept-dependent. In other words, although state nonconceptualism expresses a distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs, it fails to throw light on its explanation. Bermúdez's and Toribio's remarks are no doubt legitimate, but they do not amount to anything like a refutation of state nonconceptualism: instead, they only constitute invitations to expand on (SNC)'s novel interpretation of the nonconceptualist view. And the proposal I wish to voice here is precisely that one way of developing state conceptualism consists in setting this position within the larger framework of a stative view of experience. I turn to this point next.

While unpacking a stative view in chapters 2 and 4 (cf. chapters 2.1 and 4.2-3), I stressed that the notion of perceptual state is particularly at home within a functionalist conception of perceptual phenomena. Within this larger framework,

important differences between perceptual experiences and cognitive states downstream perception emerge. Commenting on Kathrin Glüer's work, for example, I flagged a functional difference on the input side of perceptual and doxastic states: whereas perceptual experiences stand more or less directly related to sub-personal processes triggered by our surroundings' input, beliefs incorporate environmental information indirectly via other perceptual and cognitive states (cf. chapter 4.3.2). Glüer also argues that perceptual experiences and beliefs are functionally similar on their output sides, a move motivated by a conception of assertive character as a feature determined by the functional role of experiences and beliefs. But, while it may be true that the notion of assertive character refers to a commonality between experiences and beliefs and that it is determined by the functional role of these psychological items, one need not concede that perceptual experiences and beliefs are functionally identical on their output sides. After all, functional similarity is a matter of degree: visual experiences and beliefs may share certain ways of affecting our psychological and epistemic economy; and yet they may diverge in other respects. In general, perceptual and doxastic states affect other mental states and action in different ways, among other reasons, because beliefs do not have the same robust (albeit defeasible) evidential force that perceptual experiences typically have. What linguistic reports we are prepared to make also varies depending on whether the information we talk about is conveyed by perceptual experiences or beliefs. Again, as examples of illusions along the lines of the Müller-Lyer diagram show, perceptual experiences are also belief-independent in ways beliefs are not (cf. McDowell 1994; Brewer 1999). Thus, glimpses of a distinction between the two relevant psychological categories have already emerged throughout this dissertation. This divide could be schematically formulated as follows:

(1.b) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual states and doxastic states have different functional roles.

Having said that, how are (1.a) and (1.b) related to each other? In other

words, how is a state nonconceptualist criterion of distinction related to the functionalist distinction sketched throughout my defence of the stative view? I think that (1.b) could complement (1.a) so as to address the explanatory challenge posed by Bermúdez and Toribio.

Recall that the aforementioned challenge may be expressed as follows: why might perceptual experiences not be concept-dependent, whereas beliefs are always so? Well, I think that a natural answer is suggested by the previous remarks concerning (1.b). Perceptual experiences – or, to be more precise, the information presented to a subject by her experiences – result more or less directly from sub-personal processes and states which in turn triggered by incoming information from the world beyond our sense organs. There is an intuitive sense in which perceptual experiences are world-dependent: that is, when a subject perceives her surroundings, what she thus becomes aware of is the world itself; or again, when she undergoes perceptual illusions or hallucinations, it is natural to think that the deceptive semantic component of her experiences is somehow parasitic on previously perceived worldly items. By contrast, beliefs are concept-dependent: that is, their contents are partially or fully constituted by concepts the relevant subject possesses. The present contrast suggests why perceptual experiences need not be concept-dependent, namely, because the information they incorporate is world-dependent. In a graphic even if crude way, one might say that, when we judge something, beliefs do not unveil the world, but concepts – that is, images or representations of the world. Beliefs are not directly related to the information provided by our surroundings: as such, their contents are not determined by worldly items, but by the next best thing, namely, conceptual representations. For the same reason, beliefs are always concept-dependent. Perceptual experiences may no doubt be penetrated by a conceptual component, but their contents do not necessarily depend on them, since the world – that is, the objects, properties, states of affair, events – a subject perceives may play the role of what is perceptually presented to us.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Bill Brewer has argued that a distinction in terms of functional roles is way too general to throw light on the distinction between perception and cognition (cf. Brewer 2011, 56). This charge could be tailored so as to target (1.b), in which case it would pose a difficulty against that criterion similar to the point that Bermúdez and Toribio press against (1.a). Although I do not find Brewer's objection wholly persuasive, I am not quite sure how to meet it yet. In principle, one could hold that a requirement for explanatory clarity can be pushed only so much: in the

Unlike cognitive events and states, perceptual phenomena could be functionally characterized as informational transactions by means of which perceivers relate to their surroundings. As Armstrong graphically puts it, 'the organism can take account of the environment only if the environment affects the organism: affecting it in different ways for different states of the environment. These affections are perceptions. So the fact that perceptions of the environment are brought into being by that environment pertains to the deepest essence of perception.' (Armstrong 1968, 255) When broadly and functionally conceived, perceptual phenomena concern the ways in which perceivers are affected by their surroundings. That being the case, the reason why perceptual experiences need not be concept-dependent is that perceptual states are determined by informational interactions between the perceiver and her surroundings. Since cognitive phenomena (e.g. believing or judging) are not characterized in terms of the same kind of informational transactions, something other than the world has to take its place in the constitution and individuation of these states or events – at this point, it seems reasonable to think that what a subject believes or judges constitutively depends on what concepts she possesses. In short: while the constitution of perceptual experiences relies on worldly items, the constitution of beliefs and judgements relies on concepts and propositions. This does not rule out that some perceptual experiences could be concept-dependent or that some cognitive states (e.g. demonstrative thoughts) could be object-dependent: it only shows why perceptual experiences need not be concept-dependent. Perceptual experiences need not rely on concepts because the world does for them what concepts do for cognitive states. Although this picture is no doubt sketchy as it stands, I think it is fairly intuitive.

In short, I believe that functional differences between perceptual experiences and beliefs are not only part of a stative view of experience, but also illuminate state nonconceptualism. For, while the state nonconceptualist counts with the resources to set experiences apart from beliefs, she cannot spell out what governs such a divide. At this point, one may fall back on a functionalist view of

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end, explanations run out, 'I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned.' (Wittgenstein 1953, I § 217) Or again, for present purposes, one might specify (1.b) further by unpacking the import of perceptual experiences' world-dependent character and beliefs' concept-dependent character. Of course, this point deserves more discussion than I have devoted to it here.

perceptual phenomena: perceptual experiences need not be conceptual because perceptual states directly relate a subject to her surroundings. I do not mean to claim that the connection between (1.a) and (1.b) is a necessary or a logical one: the thought is just that both criteria, one based on state nonconceptualism and the other based on a functionalist view of perception, complement each other nicely.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have outlined and defended a stative conception of perceptual experiences. Chapter 1 focused on formulating my main target, a processive view. Chapter 2 unpacked the stative stance and addressed some preliminary difficulties that it may face. Chapters 3 and 4 went on full defence-mode. I first discussed how perceptual experiences should be individuated over time: while a stative conception neatly accommodates questions of diachronic experiential identity, the latter remain recalcitrant issues for a processive stance. Then, I argued that a key but otherwise puzzling feature of perceptual experiences, their assertive character, is also accommodated by a stative conception. Since the present project heavily drew from the similarities between perceptual experiences and beliefs, it also raises the question whether it could in principle accommodate a sharp distinction between both psychological categories. This is the issue addressed by the present chapter.

To draw the relevant distinction, one may pursue at least two different strategies. I briefly expressed them as follows:

- (1) Perceptual experiences and beliefs differ from each other insofar as they involve different kinds of states or attitudes.
- (2) Perceptual experiences and beliefs differ from each other insofar as they involve different kinds of contents.

Then, I went on to explore four versions of (2):

(2.a) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is informationally richer than doxastic content.

(2.b) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is finer-grained than doxastic content.

(2.c) Whatever their respective attitudes, perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is analog (or analogically encoded), whereas doxastic content is digital (or digitally encoded).

(2.d) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual content is nonconceptual, whereas doxastic content is conceptual.

For different reasons, all these criteria of distinction seem unsatisfactory. I then turned to a particular instance of (1):

(1.a) Perceptual experiences differ from beliefs because

perceptual states are nonconceptual, whereas doxastic states are conceptual.

The goal of this chapter was to show that (1.a), a criterion grounded on

what is known as state nonconceptualism, captures a sharp distinction between perceptual experiences and beliefs within the context of a stative view of experience. Meanwhile, a stative view throws light on the principle governing a distinction like (1.a).

Thus, I have tried to show a number of things: first, that the stative stance is internally coherent and that the processive view is not compulsory; then, that a stative view nicely defuses a number of questions which otherwise remain recalcitrant problems for the processive view; and then, that conceiving perceptual experiences as mental states need not obliterate a sharp intuitive distinction between perceiving and believing. A full defence of a stative view requires assessing many other psychological, epistemological, and ontological issues. This dissertation only constitutes the groundwork for such an enterprise.

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